

WORDSWORTH

A CRITICAL STUDY

By

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An Introduction to the Poetry of the Romantic Revival



ALLAHABAD

RAI SAHIB RAM DAYAL AGARWALA

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PREFACE

My aim in writing this book has been to supply a good critical apparatus for the study of the poetry of Wordsworth. To this end, I have discussed Wordsworth's poetry under all its aspects and have included a thorough appreciation and criticism, circumstantial, technical and aesthetic, of separate poems. Nothing is in my opinion more effective to quicken and train the aesthetic sensitiveness of a student than an intensive study of single poems. Attempt has also been made to relate these poems to the poet's poetic personality of the poet. Much help has of course been taken from the critics and interpreters of Wordsworth.

My warmest thanks are due to Mr. Raghubar Prasad Rai but for whose encouragement and generous assistance this work would never have seen the light of day.

AHABAD
October, 1937

K. K. SHARMA

INTRODUCTION

It was at my suggestion nearly four years ago that my pupil and friend Mr. K. K. Sharma, M. A., then a senior student at the Allahabad University wrote his fine book : *An Introduction to the Poetry of the Romantic Revival*. Last year while he was staying with me as my guest and preparing for the Indian Civil Service examination he again took up my suggestion to write a series of detailed critical studies of the great poets of the Romantic Revival. It is with glad satisfaction that I introduce his book on Wordsworth, the first volume of the series.

Everyone who swears by Wordsworth may or may not be a likeable person but anyone who swears at Wordsworth must be unfortunate indeed. Carlyle whose immediate reactions to Wordsworth's poetry had resulted in an outburst of calculated invective came under its spell when he heard Wordsworth's recital, in a deep, guttural, impressive voice, of some of his poems. Mill and many others of most divergent temperaments who had not the least apparent affinity with Wordsworth nor an easily imaginable sympathy with his experiences and ideal have testified to the nameless, ineffable manner in which they were affected by Wordsworth's poetry. To cultivate an appreciation of Wordsworth is to do oneself a good turn. One may easily do worse.

No one among the children of men, not even the greatest, can hope to see a literal fulfilment of one's ideals. Our world has always been a world of partial satisfactions.

The ideals which Wordsworth loved and laboured for, how finely, as they seek to affect human destiny cannot but be considerably transformed in a changing world. But they, let us hope, cannot die. They ought not to die. They are of the stuff of life and they transcend all doctrines, dogmas and departments of life. There is more in Wordsworth than the doctrinaire. His poetry of nature and of man and morals has a life beyond life. It cannot, indeed, be the whole of life, but culture will be the poorer if the essence of his poetry does not remain one of its central constituents and vital influences. Wordsworth's poetry is not merely one of the entertaining or solemn things of literature. It is 'the breath and finer spirit' of civilization itself.

An undoubted proof of the final worth and value of something is its appeal to people of widely different reactions who know their minds, and to successive generations of such people. There could be little common between Carlyle and Mill except their mutual esteem for each other and their response to the poetry of Wordsworth. De Quincey, Lamb, Hazlitt, Coleridge and Keats and then Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, Thomas Hardy and Stevenson and Lord Morley, not to name others, what group of men could be more dissimilar in temperament and taste or have fewer points of contact? Yet for each with his peculiar response the influence of Wordsworth was like something felt in the blood and felt along the heart. To many, in rare moments, this unseen influence has been like a presence not to be put by. Remember also that it is not the well-known epic, dramatic or lyric qualities, the surging spirals of human passions held breathhigh, the colour, the warmth, the intensity, the thrill, the moving

panorama of a world crowded with figures various as life, the sublime and the beautiful, it is not the high-pitched things the irresistible magic, the all-conquering forces of great literature which constitute his secret and his appeal. The thunder and lightning are not his.

“Not Milton’s grand, translunar music thine,
Nor Shakespeare’s boundless, cloudless human view,
Nor Shelley’s flush of rose on peaks divine,
Nor yet the wizard twilight Coleridge knew.”

Not Goethe’s sage mind, not Byron’s tempest passion, tempest mirth. Not these but the little, nameless, unremembered things of life, the familiar, the homely and the quiet aspects of nature and life which he expresses with an inspired simplicity rare even in the best classical literature of Greece and even there not paralleled in its inwardness and spirituality. Wordsworth scales the heights of Parnassus without the adventitious aids of literature. He alone among the immortals has raised the trivial and the small to the level of the sublime. The highest and the holiest is the most human and the most unspectacular. No circumstantial poetry like the drama and the epic can accomplish it and the best lyrical or reflective poetry is by comparison with Wordsworth’s work either too lyrical or too reflective to achieve it. It is the most difficult and the rarest thing to be true to the kindred points of heaven and home, to be natural as Wordsworth is. It is the great renunciation, the crucifixion of poetry. Is it to be wondered at, as Dorothy Wordsworth notes in her *Journal*, that Wordsworth would compose a sonnet on a shivering cold morning walking up and down a pine avenue with head

downcast and having completed it would return to his cottage perspiring ? It is a process where the rejection of death alone gives life, where the negative and the positive meet in a transcendent union. Art must die many times before it lives. The easy is the most difficult thing, and the tender as life is severe as death. The perspiration on a cold winter morning can be understood. It is sackcloth and ashes, the pilgrim's staff and uphill march all the way. The word art itself becomes a little ashamed of its name in these solitary ascents and descents, where the motions of the human heart and the breath of this corporeal frame are almost suspended and where the clouds take a sober colouring from the eye that hath kept watch on man's mortality. Call it art if you like.

If one is so fortunate or unfortunate as not to feel the need of Wordsworth's healing power, even then one might go to him for his bracing power, to be chastened and subdued, and one would not be the worse for the experience. The smart things of literature with their rapier flashes, rapier thrusts are admirable in their way but they are a little comic and therefore a little tragic. Don't make what D. H. Lawrence calls in a great phrase, the mistake of happiness. The dialectics are no mere metaphysical abstraction and nemesis no mere superstitious myth. They are inconveniently real. Wordsworth is the greatest poet of joy just because he quite often brings sad thoughts to the mind. The still sad music of humanity and joy in greatest commonalty spread are, when you come to think of it, not as exclusive, as they seem. It is sorrow not metaphysical and not circumstantial, neither pessimistic

nor morbid, no pale cast of thought, but just sorrow if you like, yet it is health and healing. And it is not unallied to wisdom whatever that word may mean.

Such a poet cannot be without his uses to our age or to any age. And I am not aware of any one book of detailed critical study of all or nearly all his best work, where within the moderate compass of the discussion, every individual poem has been shown in relation to the poet's life and to the stages of his inner experience, to other poems of the same order and to the poet's theories and conception of his art. Each poem has been treated as a unity as well as a link in the poet's work. The best critical writings on Wordsworth's life and work and on his individual poems have been selected at once in a comprehensive and discriminating manner and successfully interwoven in the texture of the book. Mr. Sharma's book contains matter scattered over dozens of books not within the reach of everyone. Nor is this volume a mere compilation of disjointed notes on the poet and his poems. It is a book structural, organic and alive, a most valuable and serviceable publication on the subject both for the general reader and the student. Mr. Sharma has done his work very well.

The University

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RAGHUPATI SAHAI

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CHAPTER I

WORDSWORTH THE MAN

1770. William Wordsworth, born at Cockermouth, Cumberland, second son of John Wordsworth, attorney-at-law, and Anne Cookson, his wife, daughter of a Penrith mercer.

Life.

1778-87. At Hawkshead Grammar School.

1778. Mother dies.

1783. Father dies.

1787-91. St. John's College, Cambridge.

1790. Walking tour of fourteen weeks in France and Switzerland ; ardour for the Revolution.

1791-2. Second visit to France : Paris, Orleans, Blois, Paris again. Continued ardour for the Revolution. Friendship with Michel de Beaupuy. Episode of Annette Vallon ; birth of Caroline. Inclination to join the Girondins. Recalled to England for lack of supplies.

1793. *An Evening Walk* (composed 1787-9) and *Descriptive Sketches* published. Walking tour by Salisbury, Stonehenge, Bristol, and Tintern Abbey to Wales.

1794. Influence of William Godwin's 'Political Justice' ; composes *Guilt and Sorrow*.

1795. Period of depression and perplexity, partly due to French affairs. Settles with his sister Dorothy at Racedown, Dorset. Meets Coleridge. Legacy from Raisley Calvert.

1797. Visits Coleridge at Nether Stowey, Somerset ; leaves Racedown and settles at Alfoxden, near Nether Stowey

1797-1807. Wordsworth's great poetic period.

1797, Nov. *Lyrical Ballads* planned, on a walk, by Wordsworth and Coleridge.

1798. French occupation of Swiss cantons shocks Wordsworth.

1798. '*Lyrical Ballads, with a few other Poems*' published at Bristol, Sept. by Cottle. *Peter Bell* written (P. 1819). Dorothy begins her *Journal*. Visit to Germany, (Sept. 1798-April 1799).

1799. Wordsworths settle at Dove Cottage, Townend, Grasmere. Coleridge at Keswick.

1800-1. *Lyrical Ballads*, with important critical *Preface*. Two books of *Prelude* finished, and *Excursion* begun. Dorothy resumes *Journal* now, and again in 1802.

1802. Visit to Calais (August). Marries Mary Hutchinson at Brompton, near Scarborough, Oct. 4. Five sonnets written ; *Immortality Ode* begun.

1803. First tour in Scotland. Meets Walter Scott.

1804. Dora Wordsworth born.

1804-5. *Prelude* finished.

1804-7. *Ode to Duty, Highland Girl, Solitary Reaper, Affliction of Margaret, Happy Warrior, Song at Feast of Brougham Castle*, etc., written.

1805. His sailor brother John drowned at sea.

1806. Lives at Coloerton, Leicestershire, from October 1806 to the summer of 1807.

1807. *Poems in two volumes* ; reviewers hostile.

1808. Moves from Dove Cottage to Allan Bank, Grasmere.

1808-10. At Allan Bank.

1811-13. At Grasmere Rectory.

1813-50. At Rydal Mount.

~~1809~~. Pamphlet on *The Convention of Cintra*.

1810. Breach between Wordsworth and Coleridge, afterwards partly healed. *Guide to the Lakes* (anonymous).

~~1812~~. Death of two of his children.

~~1813~~. Settles at Rydal Mount. Appointed Distributor of Stamps for Westmoreland.

1814. Second tour in Scotland. *The Excursion*. Hostile comment of reviewers.

1815. *White Doe of Rylstone*. *Poems*, two vols. (first collected edition), with *Essay Supplementary*.

1816. *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns Thanksgiving Ode*.

1817. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*: Criticism of Wordsworth's theories, and estimate of his genius.

1818. *Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmoreland*.

1819. *The Waggoner* (written 1805). *Peter Bell* (written 1798).

1820. *The River Duddon, A Series of Sonnets. Miscellaneous Poems*, four vols. *The Excursion* (second edition). Fifth visit to the Continent: Switzerland, the Italian Lakes, Paris (July-November)

1822. *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent*, 1820. *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (called *Sonnets* in 1837).

1823. Sixth visit to the Continent: tour in the Netherlands.

1827. *Poetical Works*, five vols.

1828. Seventh visit to the Continent: tour up the Rhine.

1829. Tour in Ireland.

1830. Rides from Lancaster to Cambridge, 'a solitary equestrian.'

1831. Third tour in Scotland : visits Scott at Abbotsford.

1832. *Poetical Works*, four vols.

1834. Deaths of Coleridge and Lamb. *Lines Written after the Death of Charles Lamb. Effusion on Death of James Hogg*, 1835.

1835. *Yarrow Revisited, and other Poems*.

1836-7. *Poetical Works*, six vols.

1837. Last tour abroad, with H. Crabb Robinson.

1838. *The Sonnets of William Wordsworth, collected in one volume*.

1839. D. C. L. Oxford.

1841. Revisits Alfoxden and Tintern. *Sonnets upon the Punishment of Death*.

1842. *Poems, chiefly of Early and Late years*. Resigns post of Stamp-Distributor in Westmoreland ; receives a pension of £300 from Sir Robert Peel.

1843. Appointed *Poet Laureate* in succession to Southey. Dictates notes on his poems to Miss Fenwick.

1845. *Poems*, one vol.

1847. *Ode, performed in the Senate-House, Cambridge*.

1849-50. *Poetical Works*, six vols., giving his final revision of the text.

1850. Dies at Rydal Mount (April 23). *The Prelude* published.

N. B.—For a fuller study of his life, read the chapters on *The Prelude*.

**Personal
character-
istics.**

Wordsworth described himself to be, in his boyhood, of a "stiff, moody and violent temper," and once, as a child, had gone into one of his grandfather's rooms to find a foil with which to destroy himself, because he thought he had been unjustly punished. His mother said that the only one of her children about whose future life she was anxious was William, and that he would be remarkable for good or evil. When abroad at the time of the French Revolution, he seriously thought of offering himself as a Girondist leader. Even after his return, his mind long dwelt with the most brooding melancholy on the future of the Revolution, of which he had formed such passionate hopes. For months and even years he says that the French collapse haunted him, so that his nights were full of horrible dreams. His thoughts by day were 'most melancholy,' and 'for months and years, after the last beat of those atrocities', he could not sleep without hideous nightmares of cruel massacre and vain pleadings in unjust tribunals.

The later picture that is presented to us of Wordsworth is that of a solid, indomitable man, somewhat taciturn (except when the theme inspired him and the company was fitting), living a retired and quiet life, having scanty dealings with the literary circles of the time.

How do we explain the transition from the Wordsworth of early days, who loved battle-histories and had a thirst for a life of heroic action to the later Wordsworth, 'self-enclosed,' isolated from the main streams of life, buried in his own thoughts and leading the life of a

hermit and a sage ? We must remember that his temperament was not naturally cool. One acute observer speaks of the fearful intensity of his feelings and affections, and says that if his intellect had been less strong, they would have destroyed him long ago. De Quincey noted his look of premature age, "the furrowed and rugged countenance, the brooding intensity of the eye, the bursts of anger at the report of evil doings"—the signs of the passionate forces which worked within him. He himself in his many self-revelations conveys the impression of a nature hard to govern, of violent passions disciplined with difficulty, of wild and tumultuous desires conquered only by incessant vigilance. Thus we see that if Wordsworth was calm, his calm was the fruit of long discipline and fortitude. The Puritan discipline which he applied to his life moulded his character, and a constant life of plain living and high thinking left little room for the casual graces of persiflage and banter.

(Wordsworth was not a companionable man.) He had no convivial tendencies. He was not suave, not fascinating, scarcely prepossessing. He was singularly insensible to humour. (His neighbours said that they never heard him laugh, and remarked that you could tell from his face that there was no laughter in his poetry.) He took life seriously, and Poetry was to him 'as serious as life.) Yet, it must be remembered that beneath his gruff exterior throbbed a very warm heart. His treatment of poor Hartley Coleridge is above praise. He treated him as an erring son, and when all hope of reclaiming him was over, paid for his lodgings, cared for his wants and

smoothed his passage to the grave. If anyone was sick in the place, he must go to see him. In his domestic relations he showed passionate tenderness. When his brother drowned, Wordsworth's grief and suffering were far beyond the measure of ordinary men. Aubrey de Vere says that nearly forty years after Wordsworth had lost two of his children, "he described the details of their illness with an exactness and an impetuosity of troubled excitement such as might have been expected, if the bereavement had taken place but a few weeks before."

Says Dawson, "His imaginative faculty made him a poet; but under all his intellectual life, there throbbed the difficult pulse of a valorous restlessness, and he had in him the pith and sinew of the hero. Poets have too often been the victims of their own sensitiveness, but Wordsworth stands among them as a man of stubborn strength, an altogether sturdy and unsubduable man. "Out of this sense of loneliness," a friend once wrote to Harriet Martineau, "shall grow your strength, as the oak, standing alone, grows and strengthens with the storm; whilst the ivy, clinging for protection to the old temple-wall, has no power of self-support." Doubtless the loneliness of Wordsworth's life fed his strength, and no finer image than that of the oak could be found to describe the resolute vigour of Wordsworth's character. He certainly was no weak spray of ivy clinging to a temple wall; but he never forgot the temple and its sanctities notwithstanding; and if he was an oak, it was an oak that had its roots in sacred soil, and cast the shadow of its branches on the doorways of the sanctuary."

By De Quincey—De Quincey first saw Wordsworth in 1807, when Wordsworth was thirty-seven and had a fine sombre complexion, 'resembling that of a Venetian senator or a Spanish monk.' "He was, upon the whole, not a well-made man. His legs were pointedly condemned by all female-connoisseurs in legs; not that they were bad in any way, which *would* force itself upon your notice. There was no absolute deformity about them.....But the worst part of Wordsworth's person was the bust; there was a narrowness and a droop about the shoulders which became striking, and had an effect of meanness, when brought into close juxtaposition with a figure of a more statuesque build.....the total effect of his person was always worst in a state of motion. Meantime, his face—that was one which would have made amends for greater defects of figure. Many such, and finer, I have seen among the portraits of Titian, and, in a later period, amongst those of Vandyke...but none which has more impressed me in my own time...It was a face of the long order; often falsely classed as oval...The head was well filled out...The forehead was not remarkably lofty...but it is, perhaps, remarkable for its breadth and expansive development. Neither are the eyes of Wordsworth "large"...on the contrary, they are (I think) rather small; but *that* does not interfere with their effect, which at all times is fine, and suitable to his intellectual character...his eyes are not, under any circumstances, bright, lustrous or piercing; but after a long day's toil in walking, I have seen them assume an appearance the most solemn and spiritual that it is possible for the human eye to wear. The light

**Some pen-
portraits
and testi-
monies.**

which resides in them is at no time a superficial light ; but, under favourable accidents, it is a light which seems to come from unfathomed depths : in fact, it is more truly entitled to be held "the light that never was on land or sea," a light radiating from some far spiritual world, than any of the most idealizing that ever yet a painter's hand created. The nose, a little arched, is large ; which by the way...has always been accounted an unequivocal expression of animal appetites organically strong. And that expressed the simple truth : Wordsworth's intellectual passions were fervent and strong ; but they rested upon a basis of preternatural animal sensibility diffused through *all* the animal passions (or appetites)... The mouth, and the whole circumjacenties of the mouth, composed the strongest feature in Wordsworth's face ; there was nothing specially to be noticed that I know of in the mere outline of the lips ; but the swell and protrusion of the parts above and around the mouth are both noticeable in themselves, and also because they remind me of a very interesting fact which I discovered about three years after this my first visit to Wordsworth."

(Reminiscences of the Lake Poets, 1834)

By Hazlitt—"The next day Wordsworth arrived from Bristol at Coleridge's Cottage. I think I see him now. He answered in some degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and Don Quixote-like. He was quaintly dressed (according to the costume of that unconstrained period) in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll or lounge in his gait, not unlike his own Peter Bell. There was a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples,

a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance), an intense, high, narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of the face. Chantrey's bust wants the marking traits, but he was teased into making it regular and heavy. Haydon's head of him, introduced into the 'Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem,' is the most like the drooping weight of thought and expression. He sat down and talked very naturally and freely, with a mixture of clear, gushing accents in his voice, a deep, guttural intonation, and a strong mixture of the northern burr, like the crust on wine."

By Leigh Hunt—"Walter Scott said, that the eyes of Burns were the finest he ever saw. I cannot say the same of Wordsworth's; that is, not in the sense of the beautiful, or even of the profound. But certainly I never beheld eyes that looked so inspired or supernatural. They were like fires half burning, half smouldering, with a sort of acrid fixtured regard and seated at the further end of two caverns. One might imagine Ezekiel or Isaiah to have had such eyes."

By Haydon—"I do not know anyone I would be so inclined to worship as a purified being...He is a perfect being and will hereafter be ranked as one who had a portion of the spirit of the mighty ones, especially Milton, but who did not possess the power of using that spirit otherwise than with reference to himself and so to excite a reflex action only...In phrenological development he is without constructiveness, while imagination is as big as an egg."

By Dorothy—"Christopher is steady and sincere in his attachments, William has both these virtues in an eminent degree, and a sort of violence of affection, if I may so term it, which demonstrates itself into every moment of the day, when the objects of his affection are present with him, in a thousand almost imperceptible attentions to their wishes, in a sort of restless watchfulness which I know not how to describe, a tenderness that never sleeps, and at the same time a delicacy of manner as I have observed in few men."

By Carlyle—"He talked well in his way ; with veracity, easy brevity, and force. His voice was good, frank, sonorous ; though practically clear, distinct, forcible, rather than melodious ; the tone of him business-like, sedately confident, no discourtesy, yet no anxiety (about being courteous ; a fine wholesome rusticity), fresh as his mountain-breezes, sat well on the stalwart veteran, and on all he said and did. You would have said he was a usually taciturn man, glad to unlock himself, to audience sympathetic and intelligent, when such offered itself. His face bore marks of much, not always peaceful meditation ; the look of it not bland or benevolent so much as close, impregnable, and hard ; a man *multa tacere loquive poratus*, in a world where he had experienced no lack of contradictions as he strode along. The eyes were not very brilliant, but they had a quiet clearness ; there was enough of brow, and well-shaped. He was large-boned, lean, but still firm-knit, tall, and strong-looking when he stood ; a right 'good old steel-grey figure, with a fine rustic simplicity and dignity about him, and a veracious *strength* looking through him, which

might have suited one of those old steel-grey *Mark-grafs*, whom Henry the Fowler set up toward the marches, and do battle with the intrusive heathen in a stalwart and judicious manner."

From Rawnsley's Collations of reminiscences of Wordsworth among the peasantry--He was "a plainish-faced man, but a fine man, leish, and almost always upon the road. He wasn't a man of many words, would walk by you times enuff wi'out sayin'owt, specially when he was in study. He was always a-studying, and you might see his lips a-goin' as he went along the road"

Another speaks of him as "a vara practical-eyed man, a man as seemed to see aw that was stirrin'." When he was making a poem, "he would set his head a bit forward, and put his hands behint his back. And then he would start a-bumming, and it was bum, bum, bum, stop; and then he'd set down, and git a bit o' paper out, and, write a bit. However, his lips were always goan' whoale time he was upon gress walk. He was a kind man, there's no two words about that; if anyone was sick i' plaace, he wad be off to see til', em."

He "was not lovable in the faace, by noa means...a desolate-minded man; as for his habits, he had noan; niver knew him with a pot i' his hand, or a pipe in his mouth."

Miss Martineau paints him as she often met him, "attended perhaps by half-a-score of cottagers' children, the youngest pulling at his cloak or holding by his trousers, while he cut ash switches out of the hedge for them." She also says that his life was "self-enclosed."

Rawnsley tells a story of how a pastor in a far-away parish was asked by a very refined, handsome-looking

woman on her death-bed to read over to her and to her husband the poem of "The Pet Lamb," and how she had said at the end, "That was written about me ; Mr. Wordsworth often spoke to me, and patted my head when a child," and had added with a sigh, "Eh, but he was such a dear kind old man !"

When *Emerson* visited him he was much amused to see Wordsworth solemnly prepare himself for action, and then declaim like a schoolboy his latest sonnet on Fingal's Cave

Southey said, "There never was and never would be a greater poet."

Coleridge said, "Wordsworth is a very great man, the only man to whom at all times and in all modes of excellence I feel myself inferior." Coleridge conveys his impression of Wordsworth's strength of character, no less than of his genius, in the pathetic lines written in the days of his own eclipse and sorrow.

O GREAT BARD !

Ere yet that last strain dying awed the air,
With steadfast eye I viewed thee in the choir
Of ever-enduring men.
Ah ! as I listened with a heart forlorn,
The pulses of my being beat anew".

Wordsworth's picture of himself, quoted by Myers, in the lines written in Thomson's "Castle of indolence" :—

" Full many a time, upon a stormy night,
His voice came to us from the neighbouring height,
Oft did we see him driving full in view
At mid-day when the sun was shining bright ;

What ill was on him, what he had to do,
 A mighty wonder bred among our quiet crew.
 Ah ! piteous sight it was to see this Man,
 When he came back to us a withered flower,
 Or, like a sinful creature, pale and wan.
 Down would he sit ; and without strength or power
 Look at the common grass from hour to hour ;
 And often times how long I fear to say,
 Where apple trees in blossom made a bower,
 Retired in that sunshiny shade he lay ;
 And, like a naked Indian, slept himself away.
 Great wonder to our gentle tribe it was
 Whenever from our valley he withdrew ;
 For happier soul no living creature has
 Than he had, being here the long day through.
 Some thought he was a lover, and did woo ;
 Some thought far worse of him, and judged him
 wrong :
 But Verse was what he had been wedded to ;
 And his own mind did like a tempest strong
 Come to him thus, and drove the weary wight
 along ".

**Annette
 Vallon
 episode.**

This episode is a post-War discovery, and we owe
 it to the researches of Legouis and Harper.
 It makes Wordsworth once more 'need ex-
 planation.'

Wordsworth reached Paris on November 30, 1791.
 Then he proceeded to Orleans, where, in his search for
 lodgings, he made the acquaintance of a 'family which
 I find very agreeable'. This family was that of a certain
 Paul Vallon, and in the same house there was staying

Paul's sister, Annette. Wordsworth fell in love with Annette, and before many weeks had passed Annette

".....Wanting yet the name of wife

Carried about her for a secret grief,

The promise of a mother."

Annette's father, who was a surgeon of good standing at Blois had died and her mother having married again, she was somewhat unprotected.

Wordsworth followed her to Blois and to Orleans, where on December 15, a daughter was born and christened Anne Caroline Wordsworth. Wordsworth returned to England.

Wordsworth has nowhere spoken of this episode; his official biographer, his nephew, suppressed it, and it remained unknown to the world at large until the record of his daughter's marriage in 1816 was discovered by Professor Harper. But Wordsworth concealed it neither from his sister nor (after his marriage) from his wife.

Herbert Read says, "I think that this passion and all its melancholy aftermath was the deepest experience of Wordsworth's life—the emotional complex from which all his subsequent career flows in its intricacy and uncertainty."

Herford is more generous and says, "It proves that we have not to do with a man who walked without stain because he was temperamentally immune, turning with effortless austerity equally from every sensual allurement; but with one whose guard was overcome, for the first and probably the last time, only when the exaltation of passion and of the answering passion of

another, made the excitement of the senses seem to be not indulgence of an appetite but a union of souls."

It is commonly held that the episode of Wordsworth's liaison with Annette is substantially reflected in the more valuable parts of *Vaudracour and Julia*. The narrative was originally told at length at the close of Book IX of *The Prelude* (A), but published as a separate poem in 1820, with the following odd note: "The following tale was written as an Episode, in a work from which its length may perhaps exclude it. The facts are true; no inventions as to these has been exercised, as none was needed." In the notes dictated to Miss Fenwick late in his life, the tracks are covered still more circumstantially: "Faithfully narrated, though with the omission of many pathetic circumstances, from the mouth of a French lady, who had been an eye-and ear-witness of all that was done and said. Many long years after I was told that Duplignè was then a monk in the Convent of La Trappe." Asks Read, "This Duplignè is a mystery, for such a character does not appear in the poem. Was Wordsworth's memory reverting to some still more complete version of the poem which he had taken care to destroy?"

'Vaudracour and Julia' was regarded by Arnold as Wordsworth's very worst poem, but, since the discovery of this episode, it has become almost a 'human document.'

The story is like this. Vaudracour and Julia, who had grown up together in a small town in the heart of France, fall desperately in love with each other. This union is opposed by Vaudracour's father, on the ground that one of the nobility cannot demean himself by marrying a maiden of no rank.

A few passages stand out from the context by the intensity with which they express the transfiguring magic of passion; they are too unlike anything else in Wordsworth to have any source but his own experience. The ecstatic nature of Vaudracour's love is described by Wordsworth in lines of unusually sensuous beauty :

“ Earth lived in one great presence of the spring,
Life turn'd the meanest of her implements
Before his eyes to price above all gold,
The house she dwelt in was a sainted shrine,
Her chamber-window did surpass in glory
The portals of the East, all paradise
Could by the single opening of a door
Let itself in upon him, pathways, walks,
Swarm'd with enchantment till his spirit sank
Beneath the burden, overbless'd for life.”

The lovers finally rebelled against the unjust veto, either ‘through effect of some delirious hour,’ or because the youth in his desperation

“ Seeing so many bars betwixt himself

And the dear haven where he wished to be,”

decided to entrust himself ‘to Nature for a happy end of all.’ Nature responded in the usual way, and an illegitimate child was born to Julia. The rest of the poem is taken up with plots for concealments, stolen interviews, the tyranny of Vaudracour's father, a thousand fears and hopes, coming finally to a ridiculous conclusion, with Julia in a convent, and Vaudracour retiring with the child to a lodge deep in the forest. There, after a short time the child ‘by some mistake, or indiscretion of the father, died’ and Vaudracour wasted his days in those solitary shades an ‘imbecile mind.’

All this was excluded from the final version of the *Prelude*. The few lines that Wordsworth inserted to cover the gap are not without their significance. He refers to the tale of 'Vaudracour and Julia' and says :

"Thou, also, there mayest read,
At leisure, how the enamoured youth was driven,
By public power abased, to fatal crime,
Nature's rebellion against monstrous law ;
How, between heart and heart, oppression thrust
Her mandates, severing whom true love had joined,
Harnessing both ; until he sank and pressed
The Couch his fate had made for him ; supine,
Save when the stings of viperous remorse,
Trying their strength, enforced him to start up,
Aghast and prayerless."

The tale of Vaudracour and Julia differs in many details from the tale of Wordsworth and Annette, but the main feelings involved are the same ; the same delirious passion, the same sense of frustration, the same atmosphere of intrigue and concealment, and then a forced parting and 'the stings of viperous remorse trying their strength.' (Herbert Read)

From a statement in Carlyle's 'Reminiscences,' to the effect that Wordsworth told him that he had witnessed the execution of Gorsas, which took place on October 7th, 1793 and from a letter written by Wordsworth on February 17th, 1794, to William Mathews, Professor Harper concludes that Wordsworth paid a flying visit to France in 1793, but, witnessing the execution of the Girondist Deputy Gorsas, had to beat a retreat without seeing Annette.

From 1793 to 1802, Wordsworth remained parted from Annette. This was a period of deep mental stress for Wordsworth. Herbert Read says that *Guilt and Sorrow*, *The Borderers* and *Margaret* are but projections of this confused state of mind—"efforts, unconscious perhaps, to cast off the burden, to resolve the crisis in the objectivity of a work of art."

It is in 1802 that Wordsworth meets Annette and her daughter again at Calais; and he and Dorothy remained there for a whole month. Why did Wordsworth not marry Annette? Perhaps because that marriage, which would have taken her into a foreign, Protestant country, of whose language she was wholly ignorant, would have been for her and her family a wholly unacceptable solution, perhaps because Wordsworth thought that the dignity of his worldly existence would be compromised if he returned to England with a French wife and a ten year old daughter, perhaps because Wordsworth's love for Annette had, during nine years of enforced separation, become extinct, or perhaps because of all these. Why, then, did Wordsworth remain so long at Calais? Perhaps because he was busy cajoling Annette into separation, perhaps because he loved his little daughter. Conjectures apart, the fact remains that in 1802 Wordsworth and Annette were finally separated. In after years, Dorothy kept up a correspondence with Annette or Caroline, but Wordsworth grew so callous about the whole affair that when in 1820 he stayed at Paris for some days, he had, as Read sarcastically puts it, the melancholy pleasure of introducing his wife to Annette. It is now known, however, that Wordsworth paid to Annette, Caroline, after her

marriage in 1816, an annuity of £30, replaced in 1835 by a gift of £400. Annette died in Paris on January 10th, 1841.

(Miss E. Batho, T. L. S., April 3, 1930)

Wordsworth was probably thinking of Annette and their child, when he wrote 'Her Eyes are wild' and 'The Ruined Cottage.' The motive of madness and the derangement of a bereaved mother occur in Wordsworth again and again, and it is possible that some personal ground occasioned this iterated recourse to that theme. Such lines as

"Thy father cares not for my breast,
'Tis thine, sweet baby, there to rest"
Or

"Dread not their taunts, my little life;
I am thy father's wedded wife
And every day we two will pray
For him that's gone and far away"

are vibrant with the anguish of a personal experience.

The relation between Wordsworth and his sister was abnormal from its intensity. She was two years younger than himself, and even as early as 1778, her influence had begun to act upon him. The part she played in the formation of his character he exquisitely describes in his poem to the 'Sparrow's Nest.'

**Words-
worth and
Dorothy.**

"The blessing of my later years
Was with me when a boy.
She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
And humble cares, and delicate fears;
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;
And love, and thought, and joy."

The death of the mother separated brother and sister—the latter went to reside with her maternal relations; the former was sent to school at Hawkshead.

In 1789, during his summer vacation from Cambridge, Wordsworth spent some time with Dorothy. "She seemed a gift then first bestowed."

Wordsworth and Dorothy meet again in 1794; and from 1794 until her mind broke down in 1828, she was his most constant companion.

Dorothy has been portrayed by Coleridge and De Quincey. 'A woman indeed!' wrote Coleridge, after their first meeting in June, 1797, 'Her eye...watchful in subtlest observation!' De Quincey, some years later, emphasized the "exceeding sympathy, always ready and always professed, by which she made all that one could tell her reverberate, as it were...to one's own feelings by the manifest impression it made upon hers."

Her beautiful nature lies open to us in her exquisite 'Journals.' We note in it the delicacy of her appreciation of all the human interest of the scenes visited, a considerable power of artless intensity in describing any scene, whether grand or simple, which struck her imagination, and a certain ardent nimbleness in her manner of looking at things.

Dorothy's influence was largely responsible for redeeming Wordsworth from the state of lethargic aimlessness that he was in upon the failure of his political hopes. In 1795 Wordsworth was as unsettled as man could well be, and was without any true aim or work in life. He was, to quote F. W. Myers, "a rough and somewhat stubborn young man, who, in nearly thirty years of life, had seemed alternately to idle without grace and to

study without advantage, and it might well have seemed incredible that he could have anything new or valuable to communicate to mankind." Depressed in heart, bewildered in intellect, in danger even of letting slip the great saving truths of Reason, and taking refuge in abstract Science from the scoffing spirit by which a man revenges himself on his own delusions, he thanks

"The bounteous Giver of all good,
That the beloved sister in whose sight
Those days were passed ...
Maintained for me a saving intercourse
With my true self ...
She, in the midst of all, preserved me still
A poet, made me seek beneath that name,
And that alone, my office upon earth."

She led him back to the healing solitude of nature, where alone, as she justly perceived, his mind could find a fit environment and his powers could ripen into greatness. She restored him to the life of the senses after the dark tyranny of a life of abstract thought. How complete was the recovery of the poet under the humanising and tranquillising influence of this loving and beloved sister, is seen from an interesting passage in the *Biographia Literaria*. Speaking of his residence at Stowey, Coleridge says, "I was so fortunate as to acquire, shortly after my settlement there, an invaluable blessing in the society and neighbourhood of one to whom I could look up with equal reverence, whether I regarded him as a poet, a philosopher, or a man. His conversation extended to almost all subjects, except physics and politics; *with the latter he never troubled himself.*"

Dorothy saved Wordsworth not only from a 'mental' crisis, but also from a 'moral' crisis. Says Herbert Read, "By giving him her love and sympathy and daily care and presence, she destroyed that terrible physical blankness that descends on us when we are suddenly parted from some one we have loved habitually. She filled this blank, and not mutely or passively, but as an active consoling and inspiring agent." Says F. W. Myers, "In this gifted woman Wordsworth found a gentler and sunnier likeness of himself; he found a love which never wearied, and a sympathy fervid without blindness, whose suggestions lay so directly in his mind's natural course that they seemed to spring from the same individuality, and to form at once a portion of his inmost being."

Another great service of Dorothy to Wordsworth was that she continued during the greater part of his life to be a kind of poetical conscience to him. She was his first public, and, to quote Lowell, belonged to that class of prophetically appreciative temperaments whose apparent office it is to cheer the early solitude of original minds with messages from the future.

Dorothy's nature was simpler, purer, more exquisite than Wordsworth's. She had not, of course, his grasp of mind, his intellectual strength or his poetic power, but her sensibility was as acute and her sensitiveness to nature as keen.

"Birds in the bower, and lambs in the green field,
 Could they have known her, would have loved;
me thought

Her very presence such a sweetness breathed,
 That flowers, and trees, and eyen the silent hills,

And everything she looked on, should have had
 An intimation how she bore herself
 Towards them, and to all creatures."

As Wordsworth tells her in the great passage of 'The Prelude,' she withdrew him from the sway of the sterner and more formidable elements of his character, the beauty that hath terror in it, called forth the shy sensibilities of his nature, and taught an originally harsh and austere imagination to surround itself with fancy and feeling, thus putting back the hour of the hardening and stiffening intellectuality of his last years :

" Thou didst soften down

This over-steranness ; but for thee, sweet Friend,
 My soul, too reckless of mild grace, had been
 Far longer what by Nature it was framed,
 Longer retain'd its countenance severe,
 A rock with torrents roaring, with the clouds
 Familiar, and a favourite of the stars :
 But thou didst plant its crevices with flowers,
 Hang it with shrubs that twinkle in the breeze,
 And teach the little birds to build their nests
 And warble in its chambers."

Again, Dorothy brought to Wordsworth much material already more than half adapted to the uses of poetry. In the poem called 'Beggars,' Wordsworth appropriates and versifies an experience of his sister's, recorded in her *Journal*. The germs of the lines to a Highland girl at Inversneyde and of "What, are you stepping Westward?" to take only a few examples out of many, are to be found in Dorothy's accounts in her Scotch Journal. Wordsworth has fully and repeatedly expressed his sense of debt to her.

"Where'er my footsteps turned,
 Her voice was like a hidden Bird that sang,
 The thought of her was like a flash of light,
 Or an unseen companionship, a breath
 Or fragrance independent of the wind."

Says De Quincey, "Properly, and in a spirit of prophecy was she named Dorothy; for, as that name apparently predestinates her who bears it to figure rather in the character of aunt than of mother, so, also, in its Greek meaning, gift of God, well did this name prefigure the relation in which she stood to Wordsworth, the mission with which she was charged to wait upon him as the tenderest and most faithful of domestics; to love him as a sister; to sympathize with him as a confidante, to counsel him as one gifted with a power of judging that stretched as far as his own for producing; to cheer him and sustain him by the natural expression of her feelings—so quick, so ardent, so unaffected—upon the probable effect of whatever thoughts, plans, images he might conceive; finally, and above all other ministrations, to ingraft, by her sexual sense of beauty, upon his masculine austerity that delicacy and those graces which else it would not have had."

Some of Wordsworth's biographers point out that Dorothy's devotion to Wordsworth may have been fraught with a kind of hurtful influence to his poetry and his character. She may have encouraged his tendency to exaggerate the value of the commonplace, to select ordinary subjects and themes and to ignore things of larger and more vital import. It is possible that Dorothy's keen and superabundant sensibility, uncontrolled by the higher

mental powers, made her, and through her, him also too susceptible to the ordinary in life and nature. As Wordsworth himself says in the 'Tintern Abbey' lines, she still apprehends beauty with 'dizzy rapture,' not yet with 'the joy of elevated thoughts.' Yet it is extremely doubtful that the larger horizons of thought and the themes of vaster moment were ever really in danger. What is trivial to the generality of men was not trivial to Wordsworth. He kept a sense of the utter foreignness and strangeness of the most trivial human experiences. And it is on the ground of the absence of this sense from Dorothy and indeed of all women that Raleigh rejects the claim of those critics who, on the strength of her *Journal*, find in her the makings of a better poet than her brother.

Wordsworth was married to Mary Hutchinson on Oct. 4th, 1802. She was Wordsworth's cousin and had been at the same dame's school in Penrith. He had met her again in 1789, during his second summer vacation from Cambridge, then, in his own words,

"By her exulting outside look of youth

And placid under-countenance first endeared."

(Prelude Bk. VI)

Between Mary Hutchinson and Dorothy a firm friendship had always existed, and Mary had been one of the first of their friends to be invited to stay with them when they settled at Racedown in 1797.

De Quincey has given us a portrait of Mary Hutchinson. He describes Mrs. Wordsworth, a few years after her marriage, as a tall young woman, with the most winning expression of benignity upon her features that

he had ever beheld, and with such a frank air, and native goodness of manner, as at once to put a stranger at his ease with her. Her figure was good, though rather slender, her complexion fair, and blooming with an animated expression of health. Her eyes were of vesper gentleness, in which there was a more than slight obliquity of vision. In the expression of her features there was a sunny benignity, a radiant gracefulness 'such as in this world I never saw equalled or approached.' "Though generally pronounced very plain, she exercised all the practical power and fascination of beauty through the mere compensating charms of sweetness all but angelic; of simplicity the most entire; womanly self-respect and purity of heart speaking through all their looks, acts and movements."

Two years after the marriage, Wordsworth wrote that beautiful lyric on his wife, which begins, "She was a phantom of delight." Herbert Read feels that some quality is missing from the tribute in its last stanza. He says, "The image is beautiful, but it is tame. One element is not there, and that is not merely passion, but any trace of sensuous ecstasy. Thoughtful, temperate, enduring, comforting—these are Roman virtues, excellent in a matron, but irrelevant to the lover." The fact is, Read points out, that Wordsworth was never passionately in love with Mary, and that the full force of Wordsworth's adolescent emotions had already been expended upon Annette.

Wordsworth's marriage with Mary was a tragic event for Dorothy. She writes in her *Journal* on the wedding morning: "On Monday, October 4th, 1802, my brother William was married to Mary Hutchinson. I slept a good

deal of the night, and rose fresh and well in the morning. At a little after eight o'clock, I saw them go down the avenue towards the church. William had parted from me upstairs. When they were absent, my dear little Sara prepared the breakfast. I kept myself as quiet as I could, but when I saw the two men running up the walk, coming to tell us it was over, I could stand it no longer, and threw myself on the bed, where I lay in stillness, neither hearing nor seeing anything till Sara came upstairs to me, and said. "They are coming." This forced me from the bed where I lay, and I moved, I knew not how, straight forward, faster than my strength could carry me, till I met my beloved William, and fell upon his bosom." Dorothy's love for Mary, however, caused her to suppress any feelings of resentment that she might have had.

Mary was a true helpmate to Wordsworth, a companion "dearer far than life and light are dear," and able "in his steep march to uphold him to the end." Their wedded life was rich in thoughtful affection, esteem, and purifying influence. Her poetic appreciativeness is attested by the poet's assertion that two of the best lines in 'The Daffodils'—

"They flash upon that inward eye,
Which is the bliss of solitude,"

were of her composition.

William Godwin's 'Enquiry into Political Justice' had an enormous vogue in 1793. Hazlitt tells us that Godwin was at this period the 'very god of our idolatry'; Tom Paine was considered for a time a fool to him; Paley an old woman; Edmund Burke 'a flashy sophist.' Wordsworth, in particular, he

**Influence
of Godwin.**

adds, told a student to 'throw aside his books of chemistry and read Godwin on Necessity!')

Wordsworth was at this hour faced with a mental crisis. His hopes in the French Revolution were being shattered. The Revolution was moving rapidly further from Rousseau's ideal of a community organized to realise the 'general will,' and Democracy, which had overthrown the old regime, seemed on the point of generating a dictatorship even more oppressive. Yet Wordsworth stuck resolutely to his opinions as long as he could. He adhered 'more firmly to old tenets—that is, to his revolutionary creed—tried to 'hide the wounds of mortified presumption,' and for a time sought refuge in the arid rationalism of the day. Godwin's *Enquiry* gave him for a time "genuine but insecure relief." Godwin appeals to Reason. Man, he thought, was perfectible, and a little calm argument would make him perfect. The people, freed from the domination of their false guides, were to come to their senses and establish the reign of peace and liberty. Also, Reason leads straight to anarchy. Rulers will not be wanted when men are perfectly reasonable, and rules in general will be unnecessary when men act in each case for the best. His political ideal is, therefore, individualism or atomism. Now, Wordsworth's sympathy with the Revolution was based on his belief in the inherent purity and goodness of human nature, but the event had failed to vindicate his belief. The feelings and passions of men had played him false, but the doctrine might yet be saved if those feelings and passions could only be regarded as "infirmities of nature, time, and place," to be shaken off by a regenerated humanity. As Raleigh says, "The

modes of mathematical thought, exhibiting all things under the forms of necessity, always had a distant fascination for his mind; and now he set himself to apply them to the whole frame of social life, to test by them all the motives and standards of human action."

Wordsworth was particularly impressed by Godwin's doctrine of 'Necessity,' which explained crime by the criminal's environment, and thence condemned the intervention of the state to punish him, particularly by death. *Guilt and Sorrow*, which Wordsworth wrote about this time is in structure and argument Godwinian. Yet the poem is not completely Godwinian. Only the motives are Godwinian; the sensibility is Wordsworthian. During August and September of 1793, Wordsworth had three experiences—that on Salisbury Plain, that in Tintern, that on Snowdon—each of which deeply stirred the elements of his nature on which Godwin had least hold. Even in 'despair,' Wordsworth was not wholly without a 'counterpoise,' and that counterpoise he found in Nature, which 'when the spirit of evil was at height' maintained for him a secret happiness.

(From 1795, however, when the political situation in both the countries became hopeless, Godwinism had full sway over Wordsworth, till the close of that year.) Believing in the supremacy and infallibility of 'Reason,' he pushed without remorse his speculations forward and 'set foot on Nature's holiest places.' He was foregoing his proper intellectual path of intuition to emulate, with logic powers immeasurably inferior, Descartes and Spinoza. The result was mere futile gropings. His life of feeling and thought was plunged into chaos. Says Raleigh,

" The spirit of Shelley, compact of fire and air, could find sustenance for a time in the wilderness of Godwin's thought. But a nature like Wordsworth's, rooted in personal memories and local pieties, slow of growth and sensitive in every fibre of its affections, could not without mortal violence be reduced to a geometric pattern or transplanted to a frozen climate. The very attempt was a sufficient refutation of the theory, and from that time forth Wordsworth never again put his trust in the reasonings of political philosophy."

Already, in 1795, when he planned the tragedy of the 'Borderers,' he exhibited in his philosophic villain, Oswald, all the practical dangers of the creed. A critic says, "The play represents the kind of moral spasm by which a man repels a totally uncongenial element of thought."

Wordsworth's later political opinions were of a high Tory complexion. He looked with no favourable

**Wordsworth's
'apostasy.'**

eye on the sort of education that had been latterly spreading among the poor; he extremely disliked dissent, and disapproved of modern concession to it; he anticipated the most disastrous consequences from the Catholic Emancipation and Reform Bills. His name had come to suggest belief in the Thirty-nine Articles, Capital Punishment, and rotten boroughs. This 'lost leader,' however, had once defended the principles of Paine's *Rights of Man*; had condemned the crusade against the Revolution as a great national crime; and, so far from being orthodox, had been described by his intimate friend, Coleridge, as a 'semi-atheist.'

Wordsworth thus passed apparently from one pole to the other of the political sphere, just as his friends Southey

and Coleridge did. What, as some say, led to this lamentable apostasy? More obvious causes are these:—

(1) Napoleon's strides of conquest and the danger that at one time seemed to threaten England roused a strong national feeling in Wordsworth. He began to look upon England as the last stronghold of liberty, and henceforth war with France was identical with devotion to freedom and virtue.

(2) Wordsworth had a strong distaste for city life and for commercial ambitions. He looked with fond affection on country life and therefore on the village spire and the squire's mansion, which are the centres of this life.

(3) His early association with Coleridge tended to open to him the deep foundations on which English national institutions rest, and to inspire him with a reverence for them, and a cautious fear of weakening them by attempts at improvement.

(4) He never was at heart a democrat. Like Milton, he would have had an aristocracy of intellect and virtue.

M. Legouis has thrown new light upon the whole process of Wordsworth's 'conversion.' He points out that the change was not the abandonment of his old sentiments, but the indication that they were again coming to the surface and casting off a heterogeneous element. The superficial change, indeed, was marked enough. To Wordsworth, the revolutionary movement now represented not progress—the natural expansion of his sympathies—but social disintegration and the attack upon all that he held to be the most valuable. In his letter to Fox in 1801, Wordsworth laments the disappearance of the 'statesmen' class. The Radical, with whom he had been

allied, was attacking what he held dearest,—not only destroying the privileges of nobles, but breaking up the poor man's home, and creating a vast 'proletariat' a mass of degraded humanity—instead of encouraging 'plain living and high thinking,' and destroying the classes whose simplicity and independence had made them the soundest element of mutual prosperity.

Wordsworth was penetrated to the core by sentiments of which patriotism is the natural growth. He was a thorough representative of the Cumbrian type. His sympathy with France during the early enthusiasm of the Revolution was the natural expansion of the crude republicanism of the Cumberland shepherd and Cambridge undergraduate. But when he saw that the French were changing a war of self-defence for one of conquest, he found himself unconsciously asking (though he supposed himself to be asking simply, what is the true philosophy of the political creeds at issue ?), on what side are my really deepest sympathies ? Could a Cumberland 'statesman' grow into a Jacobin by simply widening his sympathies and involving no laceration of old ties ? Could the 'statesman' sympathise with man who used such weapons as massacre and the guillotine ? Well, Wordsworth had been wayward and independent, but never a rebel against society or morality. Violence and confiscation were abhorrent to him. 'I recoil,' he tells a friend at the time, 'from the very idea of a revolution. I am a determined enemy to every species of violence.' The later developments of the Revolution, that is to say, roused Wordsworth to look into his first principles ; and he got out of the difficulty not by way of dialectics but by resolving

to be a poet. Says Leslie Stephen, "I do not mean to scoff at Wordsworth. My own belief is that he took more simply and openly the path which most of us take, and that impartial inquiry with him, as with nearly every one, meant simply discovering what he had really thought all along."

Herbert Read suggests that Wordsworth's 'apostasy' was at any rate made psychologically credible by the necessity of his creating in his own conscience some compensation for his want of faith towards Annette, some escape from the stings of 'viperous remorse'. "From a dislike and distrust of the French nation, Wordsworth progressed towards a disbelief in those revolutionary doctrines which he had imbibed in France, in circumstances closely associated with Annette."

Professor Garrod regards Coleridge as 'the guardian angel of Wordsworth's poetical genius.' He **Influence of Coleridge on Wordsworth.** says, "Coleridge's greatest work is Wordsworth—and, like all his other work, Coleridge left it unfinished. If there was any medicine for the decline of power which stole over Wordsworth's poetry after 1807, it was perhaps to be sought from Coleridge. From Coleridge Wordsworth had derived the elements of his metaphysic; and his genius died of a metaphysical atrophy."

Herbert Read regards this estimate of Coleridge's influence on Wordsworth as too exaggerated. He does not think that Wordsworth owed much in the way of either ideas or technique to Coleridge, nor does he attribute the decay in Wordsworth's powers to the withdrawal of Coleridge's influence.

It is difficult to trace Coleridge's influence on Wordsworth because, as Dykes Campbell remarks, when Wordsworth was impressed by the thought of others, the influence "permeated his whole being, and were so completely assimilated as to have become part of himself before any of their results came to the surface."

It was probably in his reflective thinking, and in the rational interpretation of things and life that Coleridge mainly influenced Wordsworth. Coleridge's large ways of looking at things, the comprehensive sweep of his vision and thought, had a tendency not only to wean Wordsworth away from what too often seemed to be mere pettiness of theme and an exaggerated interest in commonplace, but also to arouse him to a consideration of the larger and deeper problems of human life and thought.

His friendship with Coleridge quickened his critical powers and taught him to study the workings of his own imagination in a more conscious and detached manner.

The element of ideality, the metaphysical element, which we find in Wordsworth would have been imperfectly developed without long communings with Coleridge.

But the chief benefit which Wordsworth received from Coleridge's friendship, lay, as Raleigh says, after all, in the strength that comes from early appreciation. It was Coleridge who recognized in the occasional flashes of the *Descriptive Sketches* the sign that a new and original genius had risen above the horizon of English poetry. It was Coleridge who gave unqualified praise to *Guilt and Sorrow*, and discovered in it Wordsworth's

‘original gift of spreading the atmosphere of the ideal world over familiar forms and incidents, and making them as if they were not familiar.’ It was Coleridge again who, in spite of the glaring defects of *The Borderers*, called it ‘absolutely wonderful, and thought *The Ruined Cottage* the finest poem of its kind and length in the language.

CHAPTER II

LYRICAL BALLADS

The origin of 'Lyrical Ballads' is described by Coleridge in a well-known passage. "During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two Cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination....The thought suggested itself that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of some emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real....For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves."

An 'epoch-making' book.

This account indicates exactly wherein lies the importance of the publication of that slender volume in the history of English literature. It marks the culmination and the confluence of two tendencies which had been growing side by side during the later eighteenth century,

each of which was liable to excess when it operated alone, each of which needed to work in harmony with the other, and to take something into itself from the other: the tendency towards romance, on the one hand, and, on the other, that towards naturalism. Each of these movements was, acting alone, prone to excess—naturalism, tending to a dry, hard, literal manner, unilluminated by the light of imagination; romance, tending to become a coarse revel in material horrors. To prevent its running to wild excesses, romance needed the touch of reality; to prevent its becoming unimaginative and material, naturalism needed the touch of romance. On the Quantock hills in 1717-98 the two streams flowed into one. In the "Lyrical Ballads" Coleridge and Wordsworth solved the problem of how to make the romantic natural and the natural romantic. Coleridge says, "In this idea originated the plan of the "Lyrical Ballads," in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us: an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude,

we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand."

A critic remarks, "Both classes of poems had their root in the same instinctive sense, that the wonderful and the familiar, the 'supernatural' and the 'natural' are not detached spheres of existence, but the same thing regarded in a different context and atmosphere. Here the two lines of advance along which poetry had been slowly borne by 'realists' like Cowper and Crabbe, and visionaries like Blake, at length met. Here too the crude marvel-mongering of the Radcliffian schools was supplemented by the psychological veracity, without which the marvellous cannot be the basis of great poetry. Horace Walpole contrived 'marvels' by violently distorting nature; Mrs. Radcliffe, with more illusive skill in devising them, was careful to explain them away. To Wordsworth and Coleridge the world of familiar undoubted things was itself full of expressive affinities and inexplicable suggestion."

The healthy revolt of the Prefaces to the 'Lyrical Ballads' against the stilted and citified diction of the eighteenth-century poetry helped to break down a vicious tradition and to reassert the claims of simplicity and truth. Not that Wordsworth broke completely new ground, for Goldsmith, Burns, Cowper had already gone far towards weaning the public from their vitiated predilection. Yet these poets had no clear critical intention. Wordsworth carried their experiment further in 'Lyrical Ballads,' and formed at the same time a theory to warrant his experiments. The campaign against long words, Latinisms, provincialisms, poetic fictions, bombast, and idle ornament, opened in the later eighteenth century, reaches its

culmination in the clear, acute and bold doctrines of the Prefaces to the 'Lyrical Ballads.'

The volume received the title *Lyrical Ballads* because the poems were to be ballads, telling their stories in the simple, seeming artless, way which both Wordsworth and Coleridge admired in the *Reliques*, and in *Lenore* ; but they were to claim rank as poetry, as song.

Coleridge's part in the scheme of the *Lyrical Ballads* remained, save for *The Ancient Mariner*, **Its contents** unfulfilled. His other contributions were *The Nightingale*, *The Foster-Mother's Tale*, and *The Dungeon*. Wordsworth, on the other hand, carried out his part with copious industry.

The volume contained several poems which are trivial—as *The Thorn*, *Goody Blake*, *The Idiot Boy*, several in which, as in *Simon Lee*, *We are Seven*, triviality is rubbing shoulders with much real pathos ; some, as *Expostulation and Reply*, *The Table Turned*, *Lines Written in Early Spring*, which, seemingly so slight and trifling, speak of a new individuality, distinct and unmistakable ; and the volume closes and culminates with the *Tintern Abbey* lines which have passed more completely into the general mind of England than any other of Wordsworth's poems.

On the phenomenon presented by Wordsworth's portion of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Herford remarks, "Genius struggling in the toils of a plan in part resting on insight, in part on illusion ; now reaching a half-success within its conditions, now frustrated and misled by them ; sometimes while complying with them, winning original beauty ; but only completely or superbly itself when the plan is either ignored or is not in question."

CHAPTER III

POETIC DICTION

These are found chiefly in his early Prefaces of 1798, 1800, and 1802. They were threshed at by the reviewers, and at last were dealt with by Coleridge in his 'Biographia Literaria' in 1817.

In the Preface to the first edition of the 'Lyrical Ballads' only the question of diction is conspicuous. "The majority of the following poems," says the Preface, "are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adopted to the purposes of poetic pleasure."

In the long Preface to the second edition of the 'Lyrical Ballads,' Wordsworth puts the issue on broader grounds and explains his own view of the principles of Poetry. "The principal object, then, proposed in these poems," Wordsworth wrote, "was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language actually used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect, and further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of

our nature, chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement " ; and he goes on to explain that " humble and rustic life was generally chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language ; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated ; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable ; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived ; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions."

Though the volume bore the names of both poets Wordsworth and Coleridge, the Preface was the work of Wordsworth alone. The main principles of poetic diction laid down in the Preface are already embodied in 'Guilt and Sorrow' and in 'The Ruined Cottage.' Of the former poem Coleridge writes : " I was in my twenty-fourth year,

when I had the happiness of knowing Mr. Wordsworth personally, and while memory lasts, I shall hardly forget the sudden effect produced in my mind, by his recitation of a manuscript poem.....There was here no mark of strained thought, no forced diction, no crowd or turbulence of imagery. It was not, however, the freedom from false taste, whether as to common defects, or to those more properly his own, which made so unusual an impression on my judgment. It was the union of deep feeling with profound thought ; the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying, the objects observed ; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and the height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations, of which for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dewdrops." Herbert Read quotes the following stanza from ' Guilt and Sorrow ' :

" There was a youth whom I had loved so long,
That when I loved him not I cannot say.
Mid the green mountains many and many a song
We two had sung, like little birds in May.
When we began to tire of childish play
We seemed still more and more to prize each other.
We talked of marriage and our marriage day ;
And I in truth did love him like a brother,
For never could I hope to meet with such another,"

and says, " It is simple to the verge of triteness, but it illustrates this fact which is so often forgotten : that Wordsworth was purged of ' the gaudiness and inane phraseology ' of the prevailing tradition of poetic diction

some time before he had effective contact with Coleridge's mind, and that whatever Coleridge may have contributed to the development of Wordsworth's genius, it did not concern his return to the realities of poetic composition."

Cazamian says, "The doctrine of the 'Lyrical Ballads' is an aesthetic application of sentimental democracy." When Wordsworth wrote the Preface, he had shaken off his early revolutionary creed, yet his genius and aims were essentially democratic. A critic points out that it was his dissatisfaction with the prevailing order of society and the concentration of his aspirations and hopes on another order, that led him to question the prevailing forms of poetry and cast about for a form bearing some sympathetic relation to his political ideals. Since those political ideals were inspired by men's growing impatience of artifice, convention, and shams, by a desire to get "back to nature"—to fact and reality—and by an ever-widening sense of the value of that fundamental manhood which underlies all class distinctions, of that one touch of nature which makes the whole world kin, his poetry, therefore, should rise out of the common life, should consecrate common things and breathe grandeur upon the very humblest face of human life. Wordsworth's democratic inspiration is again apparent in his war against poetic diction, in his attempts to save the language of poetry from being the language of a coterie and make poetry speak once more with the tongue of common men. Hence the statement that Wordsworth's literary reform is connected by a close analogy with his recent political zeal.

According to Wordsworth, poetry must have a purpose ; and his definition of that purpose is not ethical

but psychological. It is "to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement...speaking in less general language, it is to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature." And he adds this qualification : that the feeling developed in a poem gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling. Professor Beatty and Herbert Read have shown the influence of Hartley's associationist psychology upon Wordsworth. The very phraseology of some passages in the 'Prelude' is drawn from Hartley and the idea of the relationship existing between one's feelings and ideas is from Hartley too. "According to Hartley's psychology, our passions or affections are no more than aggregates of simple ideas surviving sensations after the objects which caused them have been removed. First sensations, 'which arise from the impressions made by external objects upon the several parts of our bodies' ; then simple ideas of sensations ; finally, under the power of association, all the various faculties of the human mind, such as memory, imagination, understanding, affection and will." Speaking, then, in terms of the Hartleian psychology, the purpose of poetry lies to develop feeling out of the ideas surviving from the sensations of daily life.

In his revolt against poetic diction Wordsworth went so far as to state that "there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." "Where shall we find bonds of connexion sufficiently strict to typify the affinity between metrical and prose composition ? If it be affirmed that

rhyme and metrical arrangement of themselves constitute a distinction which overturns what I have been saying on the strict affinity of metrical language with that of prose, and paves the way for other artificial distinctions which the mind voluntarily admits, I answer that the language of such poetry as I am recommending is, as far as possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men ; that this selection, whenever it is made with true taste and feeling, will of itself form a distinction far greater than would at first be imagined, and will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life ; and if metre be superadded thereto, I believe that a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of a rational mind. What other distinction would we have ? Whence is it to come ? And where is it to exist ? ”

Coleridge points out an equivocation in the use of the word ‘real.’ “Every man’s language varies, according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth or quickness of his feelings. Every man’s language has, first, its individualities ; secondly, the common properties of the class to which he belongs ; and thirdly, words and phrases of universal use.For ‘real’ therefore, we must substitute ordinary, or lingua communis.”

Coleridge proves that the lingua communis is no more to be found in the phraseology of low and rustic life than in that of any other class. The language of rustic life, he shows is largely borrowed, through the popular agencies of education and religion, from the language of scholars,

**Criticism by
Coleridge of
Wordsworth's
theory of
diction.**

philosophers, and poets ; it is not a separate primitive speech, but, when freed from provincialism and grossness, differs not at all, except by its limitations, from the language of any man of common sense, however, educated or refined.

The case for the peasant's speech, says Coleridge, is not rendered more tenable by the addition of the words 'in a state of excitement.' "The nature of a man's words, when he is strongly affected by joy, grief or anger, must necessarily depend on the number and quality of the general truths, conceptions, and images, and of the words expressing them, with which his mind had been previously stored."

Coleridge contends that the dalesmen are not a peasantry, but an aristocracy ; their society is a society governed by strict and proud conventions ; they are better educated and greater readers than men of equal rank elsewhere.

Coleridge denies Wordsworth's statements that from the objects with which the rustic hourly communicates "the best part of the language is derived." On the contrary, says Coleridge, "the best part of human language, properly so called, is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself. It is formed by a voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts, to processes and results of imagination, the greater part of which have no place in the consciousness of uneducated man."

In the matter of metre, Wordsworth appeals to tradition. The concurring testimony of the **Wordsworth's theory of metre.** of ages, he says, has established the laws of metre, and all reasonable people submit to them and acknowledge them as a superadded charm.

The state of excitement, which yields the right words and the right diction for poetry, is altogether too much a good thing if allowed a free run in the matter of rhythm. 'There is some danger,' says Wordsworth, 'that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bound.' "The co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed when in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intermixture of ordinary feeling, and of feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion." Professor Garrod summarizes Wordsworth's argument thus: 'Nature has safeguarded for the creative artist a "state of enjoyment" in the act of creating; and he owes it to his readers to communicate to them this "over-balance of pleasure." A principal means of doing so consists in the use of "the music of harmonious metrical language." "Painful feeling" is "always found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions"; and the description of such passions is the more powerful when conveyed in "language closely resembling that of real life." Yet in the circumstance of metre the language of poetry will "differ so widely from real life as to create an indistinct perception," to "throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition.'" Wordsworth thought that the giving up of poetic diction would involve the giving up of metre also. But he argued that metre must be retained because poetry written in the language of real life would be too harrowing without metre.

Wordsworth denies that the language of poetry is essentially different from that of prose, and Coleridge's criticism assigns as the proof of his position, 'that not only the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose, when prose is well written. The truth of this assertion might be demonstrated by innumerable passages from almost all the poetical writings even of Milton himself.' Coleridge replies, "The question is not, whether there may not occur in prose an order of words, which would be equally proper in a poem; nor whether there are not beautiful lines and sentences of frequent occurrence in good poems, which would be equally becoming as well as beautiful in good prose; for neither the one nor the other has ever been either denied or doubted by any one. The true question must be, whether there are not modes of expression, a construction, and an order of sentences, which are in their fit and natural place in a serious prose composition, but would be disproportionate and heterogeneous in metrical poetry; and, *vice versa*, whether in the language of a serious poem there may not be an arrangement both of words and sentences, and a use and selection of figures of speech, both as to their kind, their frequency, and their occasions, which on a subject of equal weight would be vicious and alien in correct and manly prose. I contend, that in both cases this unfitness of each for the place of the other frequently will and ought

to exist " Coleridge proves that metre itself stimulates the whole pitch of diction, evokes figures and images in correspondence with the passion aroused, and is thus no mere super-added, or plastered-on decoration which does its independent work without affecting the language, but rather is something which 'medicates the atmosphere.'

"And first from the origin of metre. This I would trace to the balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion. It might be easily explained likewise in what manner this salutary antagonism is assisted by the very state, which it counteracts; and how this balance of antagonists became organized into metre (in the usual acceptation of that term), by a supervening act of the will and judgment, consciously and for the foreseen purpose of pleasure. Assuming these principles, as the *data* of our argument, we deduce from them two legitimate conditions, which the critic is entitled to expect in every metrical work. First, that, as the elements of metre owe their existence to a state of increased excitement, so the metre itself should be accompanied by the natural language of excitement. Secondly, that as these elements are formed into metre artificially, by a voluntary act, with the design and for the purpose of blending delight with emotion, so the traces of present volition should throughout the metrical language be proportionately discernible. Now these two conditions must be reconciled and co-present. There must be not only a partnership, but a union; an interpenetration of passion and of will, of spontaneous impulse and of voluntary purpose. Again,

this union can be manifested only in a frequency of forms and figures of speech, (originally the offspring of passion, but now the adopted children of power), greater than would be desired or endured, where the emotion is not voluntarily encouraged and kept up for the sake of that pleasure, which such emotion, so tempered and mastered by the will, is found capable of communicating. It not only dictates, but of itself tends to produce a more frequent employment of picturesque and vivifying language, than would be natural in any other case, in which there did not exist, as there does in the present, a previous and well understood, though tacit, compact between the poet and his reader, that the latter is entitled to expect, and the former bound to supply this species and decree of pleasurable excitement.

“Secondly, I argue from the effects of metre. As far as metre acts in and for itself, it tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention. This effect it produces by the continued excitement of surprise, and by the quick reciprocations of curiosity still gratified and still re-excited, which are too slight indeed to be at any one moment objects of distinct consciousness. yet become considerable in their aggregate influence. As a medicated atmosphere, or as wine during animated conversation, they act powerfully, though themselves unnoticed. Where, therefore, correspondent food and appropriate matter are not provided for the attention and feelings thus roused there must needs be a disappointment felt ; like that of leaping in the dark from the last step of a staircase, when we had prepared our muscles for a leap of three or four. ”

and of Poor Betty :

" This piteous news so much it shocked her,
She quite forgot to send the doctor
To comfort poor old Susan Gale."

Theory, too, must be held responsible for the dreadful ineptitude of " We are Seven ", for the " Idiot Boy ", for " The Thorn ", for " Goody Blake and Harry Gill." In his recoil from the stilted Wordsworth pitched headlong into the trivial, and in its rebellion against the artificially poetic, his diction became the apotheosis of the prosaic.

Hence it has been said that it is not by reference to his doctrine that the merits of his poetry are to be explained. Myers' analysis of a stanza from one of his simplest and most characteristic poems—' The Affliction of Margaret ', is worth quoting. The stanza is this :

" Perhaps some dungeon hears thee groan,
Maimed, mangled by inhuman men,
Or thou upon a Desert thrown
Inheritest the lion's Den ;
Or hast been summoned to the Deep,
Thou, thou and all thy mates, to keep
An incommunicable sleep."

Says Myers, " These lines, supposed to be uttered by " a poor widow at Penrith," afford a fair illustration of what Wordsworth calls " the language really spoken by men," with " metre super-added." " What other distinction from prose," he asks, " would we have? " We may answer that we would have what he has actually given us, viz., an appropriate and attractive music, lying both in the rhythm and in the actual sound of the words used, —a music whose complexity may be indicated here by

drawing out some of its elements in details, at the risk of appearing pedantic and technical. We observe, then

- (a) that the general movement of the lines is unusually slow. They contain a very large proportion of strong accents and long vowels, to suit the tone of deep and despairing sorrow. In six places only out of twenty-eight is the accent weak where it might be expected to be strong (in the second syllables, namely, of the Iambic foot), and in each of these cases the omission of a possible accent throws greater weight on the next succeeding accent—on the accents, that is to say, contained in the words *inhuman*, *desert*, *lion*, *summoned*, *deep*, and *sleep*.
- (b) The first four lines contain subtle alliterations of the letters *d*, *h*, *m* and *th*. In this connexion it should be remembered that when consonants are thus repeated at the beginning of syllables, those syllables need not be at the beginning of words; and further, that repetitions scarcely more numerous than chance alone would have occasioned, may be so placed by the poet as to produce a strongly-felt effect. If any one doubts the effectiveness of the unobvious alliterations here insisted on, let him read (1) "jungle" for "desert," (2) "maybe" for "perhaps," (3) "tortured" for "mangled," (4) "blown" for "thrown," and he will become sensible of the lack of the metrical support which the existing consonants give one another. The three last lines

contain one or two similar alliterations on which I need not dwell.

- (c) The words 'inheritest' and 'summoned' are by no means such as "a poor widow," even at Penrith, would employ; they are used to intensify the imagined relation which connects the missing man with (1) the wild beasts who surround him, and (2) the invisible Power which leads; so that something mysterious and awful is added to his fate.
- (d) This impression is heightened by the use of the word 'incommunicable' in an unusual sense, "incapable of being communicated with," instead of "incapable of being communicated;" while
- (e) the expression "to keep an incommunicable sleep" for "to lie dead," gives dignity to the occasion by carrying the mind back along a train of literary association."

Similarly in the first ten lines of 'Her eyes are mild' occurs the word 'main' for sea, which is not that of a humble speaker, and is therefore against his principles; and also the inversions 'the haystack warm' and 'the woods among' are clearly there for the rhyme.

The fact is that Wordsworth is constantly on the edge of an icy precipice. The mere fact said everything to him, but the mere fact, which saps everything, comes perilously near also to saying nothing. In its highest application his simplicity becomes sublimity; in its lowest triviality. There is a simplicity of the "Anecdote for Fathers;" there is another simplicity of 'Michael.' And in the Tintern Abbey lines, and the "Ode on the Intima-

tions of Immortality," and the great sonnets, and in such lines as :

"Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns."

"The winds come to me from the fields of sleep."

"And the most ancient Heavens, through thee are
fresh and strong."

"Lucy in her grave

And Oh! the Difference to me."

"... old unhappy, far-off things,

And battles long ago—"

in all these, as Lowes says, "Wordsworth transcends, without contravening his theory." He employs the language really used by men, but his employment is now noble with a nobility attained only by the greatest. Says Cazamian, "In its extreme application, the theory of an impassioned simplicity terminates in explicit sublimity; and when once the soul is pitched in this key, the words which are naturally suitable are by no means simple words. But the expression is not conventional on that account. In these poems Wordsworth does not violate the true principle of his doctrine; he merely frees it from the accidental limits imposed upon it by a legitimate reaction against an opposite excess; and so, beyond the Romanticism that must of necessity triumph, he rediscovers the highest art in a perfect harmony of thought and form." "The truth at the core of the doctrine of Wordsworth is that one should put the language of everyday, that is to say the living and real language, to contribution for such elements as are most fitting toward the artistic suggestion one has in view. What will these elements be? They will be of a kind which the sincere and direct ardour of

the need of expression spontaneously turns to use. They are words of intense forcefulness corresponding to intense states of consciousness ; but their intensity is of a wholly inner character, so that their distinctive feature is simplicity. Thus the theory of style again joins up with the moral and social idealism, and with the mysticism of nature ; the elementary power of being are subjacent, and therefore preferable, to the artificial products of intelligence ; in every sense, it is through simplicity that one returns to actual depth."

Wordsworth's poetic career was one long campaign against the dominion of vulgar associations ; but he sometimes underestimated their strength. "My language," he confesses, "may frequently have suffered from those arbitrary connections of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases from which no man can altogether protect himself." In a letter to Professor Wilson he deals with the objections made to the 'Idiot Boy.' "I have often applied to idiots," he remarks, "in my own mind, that sublime expression of Scripture that 'their life is hidden with God.'...It is probable that the principal cause of your dislike to this particular poem lies in the *word* Idiot. If there had been any such word in our language *to which we had attached passion*, as lack-wit, half-wit, witless, etc., I should have certainly employed it in preference ; but there is no such word." Wordsworth felt that language was not true to him ; that words were deceitful, clumsy, unmanageable, and tricky. A confession of the inadequacy of language for the communication of the poet's thoughts and feelings interrupts the 'Prelude' and the 'Excursion' again and again. The 'heroic argu-

ment' of the might of souls "lies far hidden from the reach of words." The men who are best framed for contemplation are often mute :—

"Theirs is the language of the heavens, the power,
The thought, the image, and the silent joy :
Words are but under-agents in their soul ;
When they are grasping with their greatest strength,
They do not breathe among them."

And the wonders of mountain and lake defy the powers of the most accomplished speech :—

"Such beauty, varying in the light
Of living nature, cannot be portrayed
By words, nor by the pencil's silent skill ;
But is the property of him alone
Who hath beheld it, noted it with care,
And in his mind recorded it with love !"

Words, therefore, are very imperfectly adopted for the severer purposes of truth. As Raleigh says, "They bear upon them all the weaknesses of their origin, and all the maims inflicted by the prejudices and fanaticisms of generations of their employers. They perpetuate the memory or prolong the life of many noble forms of human extravagance, and they are the monuments of many splendid virtues. But with all their abilities and dignities they are seldom well fitted for the quiet and accurate statement of the thing that is. In short, they are necessary instruments of Rhetoric, and are thereby often spoilt for the rarer and purer service of poetry." Wordsworth desires to purge languages of its rhetorical and logical elements, in so far as the operations of logic impede the breadth and unity of vision. He distrusted

“ That false secondary power
 By which we multiply distinctions, then
 Deem that our puny boundaries are things
 That we perceive, and not that we have made.”

But since language cannot be purer than the society that shapes it, Wordsworth turned to the purest society known to him—to the simple people of the lakes.

In his theory, Wordsworth overlooked the society of poets living and dead, who ‘redeem words from degradation by a single noble employment.’ It was an acute criticism of Coleridge’s, passed on Wordsworth’s description of his own language as “a selection of the language really used by men,” that the very power of making a selection implies the previous possession of the language selected.

Wordsworth’s teaching has been contemptuously contrasted with Dante’s. Dante’s recipe for a poetic speech was speech denuded of all that was rustic, provincial, or mean; and chosen precisely from the language of the like of the courts of the aristocracy, and the courts of law. Yet the core of truth and conviction in the minds of these two great poets is very closely allied. Dante explained the secret of his own poetry to the second-rate versifiers who questioned him in ‘Purgatory’ by declaring that he wrote ‘What love dictated in his heart,’ i. e., what passion prompted him to say, not what ingenuity contrives. And Wordsworth meant to assert that poetry must be the sincere expression of passion, and not a decorative composition. But, as Herford points out, Wordsworth overlooked that the sincere expression of passion does not mean an expression necessarily bare and simple; that,

on the contrary, the excitement of emotion may clothe itself instinctively in figure, in splendid irrationalities of phrase, in audacities of structure utterly remote from the regular movement of reasoned speech, and the everyday talk of men.

CHAPTER IV

WORDSWORTH THE POET

Wordsworth's fame has had to pass through a fiery ordeal. His early poetry was received with a shout of derision, such as, except in the case of Keats, has never attended the first appearance of a great poet. A part cause of this unpopularity was that he led the revolt against the artificial poetic diction of the eighteenth century. He meant to plead for simplicity, and in the ardour of his attack on 'gaudiness and inane phraseology' he had allowed his plea, sound in itself and not untimely, to develop into a provocative manifesto. He did not conceal that he hoped to lead poetry into new paths. 'They who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers,' he said in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 'if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will, no doubt, frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness; they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy attempts can be permitted to assume that title.' The official leaders of taste met Wordsworth's challenge with contempt and ridicule. Jeffrey, notably, pursued the poet year after year with 'the bitterest and most reckless hostility. He denounced the volumes of 1807 as "coarse, inelegant and infantine"; described the themes of the

poems as "low, silly, and uninteresting"; and sneered at the verses "To the small Celandine" as "namby pamby." The Immortality Ode he dismissed as "illegible and unintelligible." Of "Alice Fell" he wrote: "If the printing of such trash as this be not felt as an insult to the public taste, we are afraid that it cannot be insulted." Speaking of "Resolution and Independence," he defied "the bitterest enemy of Mr. Wordsworth to produce anything at all parallel from any collection of English poetry, or even from the specimens of his friend Mr. Southey." He declared that "The Excursion" would "never do" and pronounced "The white Doe of Rylstone" "the very worst poem we ever saw imprinted in a quarto-volume" and the product of a mind in a state of "low and maudlin imbecility." Altogether Lord Jeffrey has characterized Wordsworth's poetry as a "puerile ambition for singularity engrafted on an unlucky predilection for truisms and an affected passion for a simplicity and humble life most awkwardly combined with a taste for mystical refinements and all the gorgeousness of obscure phraseology." Wordsworth took these attacks with extraordinary equanimity and, assured of the truth of what he said and how he said it, held to his even course. He wrote to Lady Beaumont in 1807, "Never forget what, I believe, was observed to you by Coleridge, that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished...My ears are stone-dead to this idle buzz, and my flesh as insensible as iron to these petty stings."

Now Wordsworth did succeed in creating the taste by which he was to be enjoyed. Public sympathy began

to come round to him, and even Jeffrey was ultimately forced to make a grudging apology for his "asperity" and "*vivacite's* of expression." A new generation was arising to welcome the novel and unique quality of his work. Hazlitt wrote: "He has described all these objects in a way and with an intensity of feeling that no one else had done before him, and has given a new view or aspect of nature. He is in this sense the most original poet now living, and the one whose writings could the least be spared, for they have no substitute elsewhere." Coleridge held that no one understood Wordsworth better than he did, and gave it as his deliberate and his final opinion that "in imaginative power, he stands nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton, and yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own." De Quincey regarded him as the most original poet of his day, and gave the permanent value of his poems in a sentence. They have, he said, "brought many a truth into life both for the eye and for the understanding, which previously had slumbered indistinctly for all men." Till today, Wordsworth's poetry continues to strike us as original and peculiar. As Bradley says, "His unique way of seeing and feeling, though now familiar and beloved, still brings (us) not only peace, strength, exaltation, but a 'shock of mild surprise'; and his paradoxes, long known by heart and found full of truth, still remain paradoxes."

The tide of critical opinion turned strongly in Wordsworth's favour as his great creative period (1798-1814) was passing. Since then his fame has grown slowly but surely. Byron for a while eclipsed him and Tennyson soon passed him in the race for fame. Each appealed

to the popular ear as he did not ; the one with a more masterful, the other with a more musical, note. The one poet had the vehement personality, and the other the rich and ornate style, which Wordsworth lacked. But the whirligig of time has brought him a full revenge. Tennyson's sugar'd accents have begun to pall and Byron seems full of mere sound and fury. Wordsworth has come to stay, and is now generally allowed to have exercised a deeper and more permanent influence upon the literature and modes of thinking of our age, than any other great poet who wrote in the nineteenth century. Some of the greatest men have described the power of Wordsworth over them. Ruskin has said that Wordsworth is "the keenest-eyed of all modern poets for what is deep and essential in Nature." John Stuart Mill has written in his "Autobiography." "What made his poems a medicine for my state of mind was that they expressed not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling and thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. I needed to be made to feel that there was real permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation. Wordsworth taught me this, not only without turning away from, but with greatly increased interest in, the common feelings and common destiny of human beings." George Eliot read the "Prelude" with ever-fresh delight, and declared : "I never before met so many of my own feelings expressed just as I should like them." Matthew Arnold also bears the same testimony as Mill and George Eliot, when he speaks of Wordsworth's "healing power." "He contests," says R. H. Hutton, "the ground inch by inch with all despondent and indolent humours, and often, too, with movements of

inconsiderate and wasteful joy ; " for there is something more than the steadfastness of tranquillity in Wordsworth : there is the steadfastness of strength. It is this moral pre-eminence of Wordsworth which is the secret of his mastery over such very different minds as Mill's and Ruskin's, George Eliot's and Arnold's. John Morley cannot grant him Shakespeare's vastness of compass, nor Milton's sublimity, nor Dante's " ardent force of vision," but he admits Wordsworth's right to comparison, and admirably states Wordsworth's peculiar gift when he says, " what Wordsworth does is to assuage, to reconcile, to fortify. Wordsworth, at any rate, by his secret of bringing the infinite into common life, as he invokes it out of common life, has the skill to lead us, so long as we yield ourselves to his influence, into inner moods of settled peace ; to touch 'the depth and not the tumult of the soul' ; to give us quietness, strength, steadfastness, and purpose, whether to do or to endure."

To some natures, of course, Wordsworth will never appeal. Macaulay could find nothing in him but an "endless wilderness of twaddle," and Swinburne can discern little save pompous dullness. Andrew Lang informs us that he does not care "very much for William Wordsworth," and Oscar Wilde writes contemptuously of him. Edward Fitzgerald writes of him as "my daddy." These are, however, merely the small impertinences of criticism and so long as the world lasts and criticism is done, there will not be wanting Shaws to condemn Shakespeares. On the whole we may say that he would be a daring man who contested the verdict of Arnold, "I firmly believe that the poetical performance of

Wordsworth is, after that of Shakespeare and Milton, of whom all the world now recognises the worth, undoubtedly the most considerable in our language from the Elizabethan age to the present time."

The history of the appreciation of any great poet exhibits itself, says Raleigh, in a series of revivals. One such revival Wordsworth underwent during the war, when a great constitutional lawyer proclaimed the 'statesmanship' of Wordsworth; and since the war the discovery of the Annette Vallon episode has made it necessary for us to revise our estimate of his personality. The disclosure of the original *Prelude* has dispelled some pious ambiguities and an illustrious physicist of the day, by welcoming Wordsworth's interpretation of Nature as a precious contribution to any complete apprehension of the real world, has compelled us to interpret him afresh.

Wordsworth was no fitful singer of an idle day; he believed he had a message to deliver, as truly
His mission. as ever ancient seer or prophet had. For this reason Wordsworth fulfils, more perfectly than any other modern poet, the ideal conception of the Bard. With all his imagination and in his moments of highest rapture, he has a practical sense of a charge committed to him. This is what he meant when he said that vows were made for him, that he was a dedicated spirit, and that he must be considered as a teacher or nothing. He was so overwhelmed by his prophetic Mission that when, in the Preface to the later edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, he gives a careful analysis of the character of
His theory of poetry. the poet, he makes only the barest allusion to the essential gift of expression. He would

ground the claims of a teacher and prophet on deeper foundations than on a ready command of beautiful and appropriate speech. The poet, he says, is a man "who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than we are supposed to be common among mankind ; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him ; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions in the goings on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them." It is chiefly, then, by his intenser and more concentrated powers of feeling and contemplation that a poet differs from other men. Sensibility alone is not sufficient to ensure good poetry ; it must be directed by a calm mind. Says Wordsworth, "All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings." Wordsworth elaborates this general statement by defining more closely the actual psychology of inspiration. 'Poetry,' he says 'takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity : the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried

on.' The process, that is to say, has four stages : recollection, contemplation, recrudescence, and composition. Says Herbert Read, " All it implies, is that good poetry is never an immediate reaction to the provoking cause ; that our sensations must be allowed time to sink back into the common fund of our experience, there to find their level and due proportion. That level is found for them by the mind, in the act of contemplation, and then in the process of contemplation the sensations revive, and out of the union of contemplating mind and the reviving sensibility, rises that unique mode of expression which we call poetry." Now, poetry does not always originate in Wordsworth's way. *The Ode to the Nightingale* was the expression of the emotions and feelings of the moment : Keats and the bird were alone in the Hampstead Garden. *The Ode to the Grecian Urn* was written on the evening of the day that Haydon took Keats to see the Elgin marbles ; so within a few hours of that inspired event Wordsworth's dictum is based on self-observation and most, if not all of, Wordsworth's own poetry did take its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity. He was

" not used to make

A present joy the matter of a song."

He rather writes of his memories. The voice of the cuckoo awakens recollections of his schoolboy-days, and he listens till he can 'beget that golden time again.' A host of daffodils seen one bright April morning dancing in the wind by the margin of a lake are a recurring embodiment of the spirit of joy each time they

" flash upon that inward eye

Which is the bliss of solitude."

His memories are memories of feeling, to be indulged and examined in long periods of rapt meditative calm. He tells us in *The Waggoner* how they sometimes came unbidden and demanded to be put on record.

“Nor is it I who play the part
But a shy spirit in my heart,
That comes and goes—will sometimes leap
From hiding places ten year deep ;
Or haunts me with familiar face,
Returning, like a ghost unlaid
Until the debt I owe be paid.”

He loved solitude and indolence chiefly because during the lulls of social intercourse and toiling reason, lost impressions were recaptured. Says Raleigh, “He had acquired an art like that of the naturalist, the art of remaining perfectly motionless until the wild and timid creatures of his mind came about him. A large part of his poetry is taken up with these resuscitated feelings. He cherished them and pondered over them, comparing them with the kindred but different emotions that accompanied their revival. In his inner life they count for so much that when he meets with some new vivid and joyful experience his mind naturally springs forward to anticipate the time when this, too, shall be added to the treasures of memory.” The *Prelude* could only have sprung from strong memory like that of Wordsworth's which retained not only outward things, but the vanishing shades and impalpable phases of his inner life. Blake had opposed memory to the imagination, but in a poet like Wordsworth they are almost identical faculties. As Oliver Elton says, “The imagination, of such a poet is his memory acting

truthfully, that is, throwing off the dross of unmeaning fact, controlling and using the power of forgetfulness properly, and shaping into beautiful form what it retains."

In a letter to Lady Beaumont Wordsworth gives an account of the purpose of his poetry, which is "to console the afflicted: to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous." He goes on to say that 'there is scarcely one of my poems which does not aim to direct the attention to some moral sentiment, or to some general principle, or law of thought, or of our intellectual composition.' And he concludes: "I doubt not that you will share with me an invincible confidence that my writings will co-operate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society, wherever found; and that they will, in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser, better and happier." Wordsworth's purpose is thus avowedly didactic. His poetry is the

**As a poet of
happiness.**

poetry of happiness. It is not written in high spirits and gallant cheer, like Scott's, nor with gaiety, like Shakespeare's poetical comedy; but it is written in a spirit of happiness, pervaded, like his life, by 'the deep power of joy.' It is one long and various exposition of "the grand elementary principle of pleasure by which man knows, and feels, and lives, and moves," and it is this happiness that is his chief gift to men—

"From Shelley's dazzling glow or thunderous haze
From Byron's tempest anger, tempest mirth,
Men turned to thee, and found not blast and blaze,
Tumult of tottering heavens but peace on earth."

And Matthew Arnold says :

“ Time may restore us in his course
Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force,
But where shall Europe's latter hour
Again find Wordsworth's healing power.”

There are other proclaimers of the way to happiness. Tolstoy, for instance,—who says : “ One of the first conditions of happiness is that the link between man and nature shall not be severed ; that is, that he shall be able to see the sky above him, that he shall be able to enjoy the sunshine, the pure air, the fields with their verdure, their multitudinous life.” Wordsworth's pre-eminence consists in this, points out Oliver Elton, that unlike Rousseau, or Ruskin, or Tolstoy, Wordsworth does not associate his doctrine with fantasy and paradox. “ On the contrary, he associates it in the most sane and natural way with real life and with real persons ; whose fates he takes as he finds them, and does not, like Tolstoy, doctor and predestine in order to suit a foregone theory.” Wordsworth would arouse the sensual from their sleep of Death, and win the vacant and the vain to

**The theme of
his poems.**

noble raptures only ‘ by words which speak of nothing more than what we are.’ He says

in *The Prelude*,

“ My theme

No other than the very heart of man.”^c

In *Michael* he tells how he was led on to think ‘ On man, the heart of man, and human life.’ The motive of *The Old Cumberland Beggar* is that ‘ We have all of us one human heart.’ Wordsworth brushes aside the merely artificial and conventional ideas about life and its values

in which we are accustomed to rest, but which confuse our vision and hamper our spiritual freedom, and is concerned above all with the essential qualities or what he calls 'the primary laws' of our nature, with those impregnable instincts which lie at the very root of life. These, he maintained, could be best studied in the ordinary circumstances of commonplace life. He saw

"little worthy or sublime

In what the Historian's pen so much delights

To blazon."

For him the chances and changes of civil life could not but seem trivial things. Man must remain for him one whose life is with God, with Nature, and with those nearest ties in creating which the mechanism of conventional society has no part. He said in his *Hart-leap Well* that

"The moving accident is not my trade ;

To freeze the blood I have no ready arts."

He found his trade in

"the vulgar forms of present things

The actual world of our familiar days."

In the prologue to his *Peter Bell*, Wordsworth claims that Nature, 'in the humblest departments of daily life,' is capable of producing just those wild and witching effects upon the imagination for which Coleridge had called in the 'supernatural'

"Long have I loved what I behold,

The night that calms, the day that cheers ;

The common growth of mother-earth

Suffices me—her tears, her mirth,

Her humblest mirth and tears.

The dragon's wing, the magic ring,
 I shall not covet for my dower,
 If I along that lowly way
 With sympathetic heart may stray,
 And with a soul of power
 These given, what more need I desire
 To stir, to soothe, to elevate?
 What noble prospects than the mind
 May in life's daily prospect find,
 May find or there create."

But the subjects that Wordsworth nominally chooses may not be the real subjects of his poems. *The Small Celandine*, for instance, is a poem on the human lot. Wordsworth does not value anything for itself so much as for what it can tell us of ourselves. He has

"among least things
 An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts
 As parts, but with a feeling of the whole."

To him

"the meanest flower that blows can give
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

He drew uncommon delights from very common things. As R. H. Hutton says, "No poet ever drew from simpler sources than Wordsworth, but none ever made so much out of so little." Wordsworth, the same critic points out, had the rare gift of detaching his mind from the commonplace series of impressions which are generated by commonplace objects or events, resisting and often reversing the current of emotion to which ordinary minds are liable, and triumphantly justifying the strain of rapture with which he celebrated what excites either no feeling,

or weary feeling, or painful feeling, in the mass of unreflecting men. "There is volition and self-government in every line of his poetry, and his best thoughts come from the steady resistance he opposes to the ebb and flow of ordinary desires and regrets." Wordsworth was not a dreamer; his musings were never reveries; he neither lost himself nor the centre of his thought. He had keen spiritual courage and stern spiritual frugality. No poet ever gave to his theme so new a birth as he. He uses human sorrow, for example, as an influence to stir up his own meditative spirit, till it loses its own nature and becomes

"Sorrow that is not sorrow, but delight;
And miserable love, that is not pain
To hear of, for the glory that redounds
Therefrom to human kind and what we are."

Says R. H. Hutton, "There is no other poet who thus redeems new ground for spiritual meditation from beneath the very sweep of the tides of the most engrossing affections, and quietly maintains it in possession of the musing intellect. There is no other but Wordsworth who has led us "to those sweet counsels between head and heart" which flash upon the absorbing emotions of the moment the steady light of a calm infinite world. None but Wordsworth has ever so completely transmuted by an imaginative spirit, unsatisfied yearnings into eternal truth. No other poet ever brought out as he has done

"The soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;"

or so tenderly preserved the

"Wall-flower scents
From out the crumbling ruins of fallen pride;"

or taught us how,

“ By pain of heart, now checked, and now impelled,
The intellectual power through word and things
Went sounding on a dim and perilous way.”

Because Wordsworth never surrenders himself to the natural and obvious currents of thought or feeling in the theme taken, but changes their direction by cool side-winds from his own spiritual nature, solitude is his element. It is in solitude that ‘impulses of deeper birth’ have come to him. Solitude and solitariness were to him intimations of infinity. They were the symbol of self-sufficiency, of power to dispense with custom and surroundings and aid and sympathy—a self-dependence at once the image and the communication of ‘the soul of all the worlds.’ Not only is Wordsworth himself lonely, he also introduces solitary figures who sustain their solitary passion, feed upon their solitary anguish, and are symbols of the majesty of ‘unconquerable mind.’ Bradley remarks, “In whatever guise it might present itself, solitariness ‘carried far into his heart’ the haunting sense of an ‘invisible world’; of some life beyond this ‘transitory being’ and ‘unapproachable by death’;

“Of life continuous, being unimpaired:
That hath been, is, and where it was and is
There shall endure,—existence unexposed
To the blind walk of mortal accident;
From diminution safe and weakening age;
While man grows old, and dwindles, and decays;
And countless generations of mankind
Depart; and leave no vestige where they trod.”

In the lines

“ With heart as calm as lakes that sleep
In frosty moonlight glistening :
or mountain-rivers where they creep
Along a channel smooth and deep
To their own far-off murmurs listening,”

he suggests the very soul of solitude. Well does Myers say, “What touch has given to these lines their impress of an unfathomable place ? For there speaks from them a tranquillity which seems to overcome one's soul ; which makes us feel in the midst of toil and passion that we are disquieting ourselves in vain, that we are travelling to a region where these things shall not be ; that so shall immoderate fear leave us, and inordinate love shall die.” Wordsworth was particularly fascinated by the solitude of the mountains. From his boyhood he was familiar with English mountain scenery, and the subduing spirit of its beauty touched his earliest life. He himself tells us—

“Nothing at that time

So welcome, no temptation half so dear
As that which urged me to a daring feat.
Deep pools, tall trees, black chasms and dizzy crags,
And tottering towers : I loved to stand and read
Their looks forbidding, read and disobey.”

Wordsworth was a true “nursling of the mountains ”
and it was under their shadows that his life

**As a poet of
the mountains.**

had thriven. It was in the daily contemplation of simple life and natural beauty among his own mountains that, after the sullen despair which fell upon him when with the Reign of Terror his hopes of

world-wide regeneration perished, strength returned to him, clearness and resoluteness of spirit, sanity and joy of mind. It was among the mountains that Wordsworth, as he says of the Wanderer, felt his faith. It was there that all things

“Breathed immortality, revolving life,
And greatness still revolving ; infinite.
There littleness was not, the least of things
Seemed infinite ; and there this spirit shaped
Her prospects, nor did he believe,—he *saw*.”

He put into words, as no other poet has, the spirit of the mountains.

“Two voices are there ; one is of the sea
One of the mountains ; each a mighty voice.”

Noble descriptive pages relating to the mountains abound in his works, notably in the *Excursion*. Hazlitt has said that one could infer that Wordsworth's poetry ‘was written in a mountainous country, from its bareness, its simplicity, its loftiness and its depth.’

Wordsworth has himself told us that his paramount aim was to be a philosophic poet ; and Coléridge said of him early that if he persevered in that aim he would not only succeed, but be the greatest poet who had ever worn the crown of philosophic verse. Now there have been widely different views on the value of Wordsworth's philosophy in a total estimate of his poetry. The early Victorians were apt to extract a gospel out of his verse because having lost their belief in revealed religion, their emotional faculties sought a substitute for religion in poetry. As Herbert Read remarks, “Into it they could read, if they so liked, an emotional pantheism which satisfied their instincts

As a philosophic poet.

without compromising their intelligence; from it they could derive a humanism which compensated them for the imagined defects of Christian dogma." Sir Leslie Stephen says that Wordsworth's poetry is precious because his philosophy is sound. R. W. Church says, Wordsworth was, first and foremost, a philosophical thinker; a man whose intention and purpose of life it was to think out for himself, faithfully and seriously, the questions concerning 'Man and Nature and Human Life.' Arnold, on the other hand, declares that the Wordsworthians are apt to praise him for the wrong things and to lay far too much stress upon what they call his philosophy. So also Herbert Read, "His philosophy is fanciful, if not false.....It is, like Goethe, a projection of his own personal psychology; it has no history beyond his own personality."

Now there is no system and ordered philosophy in Wordsworth. He has not left behind him, except in a fragmentary form, the great Philosophical Poem of his earlier aspirations. He was not at home in metaphysical logical subtleties. His philosophy, such as it is, represents intuitions or convictions; it embodies his faith as to the world and human nature, without reference to the logical justifications. He is content to expound his philosophy as self-evident. He speaks as from inspiration, not as the builder of a logical system. His mind has no structural power. Coleridge sought in vain the totality of a system in the *Excursion*.

It may be readily admitted that Wordsworth is not a philosophic poet in the sense in which Dante is. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a 'Vision,' an intuitive vision of the meaning of the universe and, what is more, actualised

and made real in a dramatic myth. Wordsworth has nothing of the kind. But while Wordsworth has left no monumental philosophical poem, his title to being called a philosophic poet cannot be so easily dismissed. He had found it "more animating" to embody his philosophy in the form of those numerous minor poems which he regarded as constituting a whole, but the unity of which is lost on the superficial. He is not a mere pastoral or idyllic poet; among the merits of his poetry is pre-eminently that of its Wisdom and its Truth. Says Aubrey de Vere, "He is England's great philosophic, as Shakespeare is her great dramatic, and Milton her great epic, poet. In the old days Greece, besides the inspiration of Apollo, of the Muses, and of Mercury, there was that of Pan. He represented that principle of life diffused throughout the universe. The wood and reed-pipe, besides those notes which charmed the shepherds and the nymphs, had its mystic strain." Wordsworth is philosophic because out of the *natural* life he creates a life of thought which transmutes that natural life, because he brings a conscious, voluntary, imaginative force to bear on his subjects, because his thoughts are not vagrant but revolve round a substantial centre, which at once incite it to motion and control it. Professor Garrod asserts that

**Is he a pure
sensational-
ist?**

Wordsworth is a 'pure sensationalist,' regarding the senses as the source of truth. Herbert Read says this his genius is sensational. These statements are partial. The lines in *Tintern Abbey* with their emphasis on the eye and ear should be read with passages where it is unmistakably assumed that reality is the result of an interaction, or

“interchange

Of action from within and from without,
The excellence, pure spirit and best power
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.”

Here the ‘eye’ means more than the senses ; it implies the ‘creature soul’ behind the eye. The highest minds are

“By sensible impressions not enthrall’d.”

They

“build up greatest things

From least suggestions, ever on the watch,
Willing to work and to be wrought upon.”

That the ‘soul’ as well as the ‘eye’ is concerned in this intercourse with the ‘great world of eye and ear’ is evident from the *Excursion*, where he recalls

“What visionary powers of eye and soul
In youth were mine.”

Bradley contends that there is always tracable in Wordsworth a certain hostility to ‘sense,’ not merely that hostility which is present in all poetic experience, but a feeling of definite contrast with the limited sensible world. “The arresting feature or object is felt in some way against this background, or even as in some way a denial of it. Sometimes it is a visionary unearthly light resting on a scene or on some strange figure. Sometimes it is the feeling that the scene or figure belongs to the world of dream sometimes it is an intimation of boundlessness, contradicting or abolishing the fixed limits of our habitual views. Sometimes it is the obscure sense of ‘unknown modes of being,’ unlike the familiar modes. This kind of experience, further, comes often with a distinct shock, which may bewilder, confuse or trouble the mind.”

Wordsworth, like Hegel, has an unusually strong **His theory of sense of the power and the possibilities of the Mind.** man or of the 'mind.' In the Preface to the

Excursion, he says :

“ Not chaos, not

The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,

Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out

By help of dreams——can breed such fear and awe

As fall upon us often when we look

Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man ”

and goes on to say that Mind can also find in itself Milton's Garden of Eden and the Elysian Fields of the ancient poets. The mind in man instinctively expects to find its counterpart in the rest of the world. For the inmost principle in man's mind is also the inmost principle in everything else. One spirit impels “all thinking things,” i. e., finite minds; and “all objects of all thought,” e. g., Nature; and rolls through, or is the unity of both forms of existence, minds and their objects. It is the same soul in Nature and in Man; for though it is distinct in every form of being, yet none the less the spirit or active principle is one, continuous, and undivided in all :

“ from link to link

It circulates, the soul of all the worlds.”

Further when the mind is poetic, it *recognizes* in Nature that one soul which is also in itself. It finds there life, feeling, joy, love. And in certain experience also it receives from Nature, and from its own depths, intimations that this one soul, enclosing both Nature and itself, transcends both, is completely revealed in neither, is untouched by the change and decay and other defects of

its partial and transitory manifestations, and beckons the mind away beyond Nature and its own finite or temporal existence. Again Wordsworth's doctrine is that imagination is the power that leads us to the truth. It is at once vision and contemplation. It brings the mind into unison with the thing contemplated, disengages the forces or principles that govern it, and interprets it in the light of these. On the other hand he thought of Fancy as dealing superficially with the outward forms or manifestations of things and depending on the rapidity and profusion with which she scatters her thoughts and images. 'Fancy,' he says, 'is given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our nature, imagination to incite and to support the Eternal. Wordsworth's belief in imagination opened his eyes to the significance of mythological religions. In Book IV of the *Excursion* he describes with much sympathy and beauty, and in a manner unlike that of previous poets, the mythological ideas of the ancient Persians and Chaldees and Greeks. They were to him proofs that man is never without some witness of the divine spirit in the worlds.

Wordsworth's optimism is only another form of his sense of the mind's greatness. His recognition of the pain and civil in human life is full enough and he portrays it minutely and unsparingly in such poems as the *Ruth*, or the *White Doe of Rylstone*, or the story of Margaret in the *Excursion*. But in man's 'celestial spirit' there is a power that can win glory out of agony and even out of sin. Further, the mind refuses to rest in any attainment it may reach, in its pursuit of "something evermore about to be," and in strange intimations that it belongs to a vaster world than that of its earthly experience.

Wordsworth's philosophy, then, is a theory of the Mind and its relations to the external world. The individual Mind, as he declared in the fragment of the *Recluse*, is exquisitely fitted to the external world and no less exquisitely the external world is fitted to the mind.

“ For the discerning intellect of man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion...”

But the life of Nature and the life of man are distinct essences. They act and react upon each other, ‘so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure.’ The exquisite functioning of this interlocked universe of Mind and Nature is the highest theme of poetry. Wordsworth traces the relation of Man to Nature in three stages of individual development, leading from sensation to feeling, from feeling to thought, and then creating a union of all these faculties in God, who is the whole of Being; by a process of association which links up, at every stage of life, experience and the experiencing self. Wordsworth's philosophy, points out Herbert Read, is no merely mystical emotionalism; it is objective, realistic, not strictly pantheistic, humanistic. Blake found it blasphemous because Wordsworth so exalts the human mind that he leaves no room for a personal God. The individual mind

“ Keeps her own
Inviolat retirement, subject there
To conscience only, and the law supreme
Of that Intelligence which governs all.”

Herbert Read remarks, “ Either God is prescient and in his will is our peace, or man is accountable to his own conscience and Intelligence, and has no need of a God.

There is no compromise between these alternatives. But Wordsworth pretended there was, and his whole philosophy is vitiated by this inherent inconsistency."

(It is usual to speak of Wordsworth as the poet of Nature ; it will be more accurate to speak of him as the high-priest of Nature. The love of Nature is to be found in all the English poets, from Chaucer downward, and it has been a fashion of late to indicate Wordsworth's indebtedness to his predecessors.) The idea of God's immanence, they say, may be found in small poets like Hamilton, Parnell, Mallet, Akenside, Beattie and Lady Winchelsea. In Thomson's 'The Seasons' the heaven and earth are filled with the Divine Presence. Cowper, too, affirms :

As a poet of
Nature.

"The Lord of all, himself through all diffused
Sustains and is the life of all that lives."

Even Pope says :

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body nature is, and God the soul ;
That, charged through all, and yet in all the same,
Great in the earth, as in th' ethereal frame...
Lives thro' all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent."

(But in spite of precedents there is something new and individual in the way in which Wordsworth regards Nature. With none of these other poets was Nature, as pervaded by a Spirit-life,) such a profound *experience* as she was with Wordsworth. His interest in Nature, and his fundamental faiths concerning her, were large due to his own mystical endowment, and to his personal relations with her during many years in a physical environment remark-

able for its beauty and grandeur. From childhood he had felt her presence warning him, leading him, fashioning him, counselling him, consoling him, refreshing him, instructing him, vouchsafing visions to him. Much of his poetry is the outgrowth of his vision and its attendant belief. Says Sneath, "It was not a mere series of hints, suggestions, illuminating gleams, mild feelings, and pensive and more or less penetrating imaginations, as seems to be the case with minor poets. With Wordsworth it was rapturous vision, profound intuition, intense and sublime passion, deep ethical conviction, reverent and affectionate communion, heavenly illumination. It was not merely an intellectual proposition to be subscribed to nor a conviction born of logical processes in reflecting upon Nature, nor even a religious conviction as such, but it was a powerful experience, the chief elements of which were vision, intuition, belief, communion, inspiration, love, and moral resolve. His poetry pulsates with this unusual sense of nearness to the life of Nature. He feels himself called of the spirit, dedicated and commissioned by the spirit, to speak no dream but things oracular. And it is thus he speaks. His genius is aglow with the living warmth and radiance of the visions and illuminations vouchsafed, and is burdened with their vital ethical import for Man. And his metrical language is not merely a vehicle for the communication of the vision and inspiration, but it, too, constitutes, in a measure, the gift of the spirit of Nature ; so that, in the richness and variety of their experience, in the penetration and profundity of their insight, in the quality and suggestiveness of their inspirations, in the sublimity of their apprehension of the moral import of

Nature's relation to Man, the humbler poets, who foreshadowed Wordsworth, are far removed from him. He is immeasurably their superior. As a Nature poet he is in a class by himself among English bards." F. W. Myers aptly says that the maxims of Wordsworth's form of natural religion were uttered before Wordsworth only in the sense in which the maxims of Christianity were uttered before Christ. "The assential spirit of the lines near Tintern Abbey was for practical purposes as new to mankind as the essential spirit of the *Sermon on the Mount*. Not the isolated expression of the moral ideas, but their fusion into a whole in one memorable personality, is that which connects them for ever with a single theme. Therefore it is that Wordsworth is venerated: because to so many men he has shown by the subtle intensity of his own emotion how the contemplation of Nature can be made a revealing agency, like Love or Prayer,—an opening, if indeed there be any opening, into the transcendent world." The originality of Wordsworth is that he never thinks of Nature in any other way than as a mighty Presence, before whom he stands silent like a faithful high-priest, who waits in solemn expectation for the whisper of enlightenment and wisdom. He does not indulge in the 'pathetic fallacy.' He does not project into Nature his own feelings and sentiments; but he goes to Nature with an open mind, and leaves her to create the mood in him. It is this delight in something different from himself which Wordsworth receives with joy and gratitude, this absence of himself in the conception of Nature, which makes his poetry about her so fresh, so happy, so like the morning air, so full of gratitude.) We entirely lose sight

of the revealer in the revelation ; we pass out of the sphere of Wordsworth's mood into the very mood and heart of Nature ; we feel the presence of something deeply inter-fused through all the inanimate world.

(Wordsworth conceived of joyousness as being a part of the essential life of Nature. Her whole being throbs with pleasure. It has been repeatedly urged that Wordsworth was not energetically alive to Nature "red in tooth and claw," that he was blind to the conflict and pain in Nature, that he yields here and there too much to contrast the happiness, innocence, and harmony of Nature with the unrest, misery, and sin of man.) But here, as elsewhere, says Raleigh, Wordsworth attempts to alter and widen the perspective, to set man at a point of view whence he may see things more truly and less partially. Wordsworth belief is that 'the inner frame is good and graciously composed', that in spite of admitted evils, and even by dint of them, the final meaning of things is good, since the ultimate principle in everything is infinite and perfect mind. (Wordsworth knew of the storms that vex the calm of Nature, of the work of her violent forces, of the incessant waste in the upper glen of the mountains, of the fury of the sea, and the flooded streams ; and he recorded it,) but yet, as Stopford Brookewrites, beneath the outward range of the elements, he knew that order ruled, that the quiet of wisdom filled the movement of all things, that on the ultimate idea of the universe there was the calm of the unbroken law : "Central peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation."

Another element in the life of Nature, according to Wordsworth, is the intercommunion of all things in Nature

with one another, their tender association in friendship and love, their self-sacrifice in mutual loving-kindness. To Wordsworth, Nature's life is a life of love. Stopford Brooke says, "This is perhaps the most beautiful of all the ideas which Wordsworth introduced into the poetry of Nature.) It made the universe not only alive, but alive with love—love without jealousy or jar or envy—and when we leave the stormy town and restore our heart in the lovely places of the earth, it is this idea which goes most with us, as we wander in the woods or underneath the wars, or by the mountain-tarn." There is a passage in the *Excursion* where the Solitary speaks of the two brother peaks which overhang the glen, which records this inter-communion of natural things :

" Those lusty twins, exclaimed our host, if here
It were your lot to dwell, would soon become
Your prized companions. Many are the notes
Which, in his tuneful course, the wind draws forth
From rocks, woods, caverns, heaths and dashing
shores ;

And well those lofty brethren bear their part
In the wild concert."

(Again, the spirit of Nature is an ethical spirit. A moral spirit lives in all things, bound together by moral relations and laws. The order of the universe is moral order.

Finally the spirit of Nature is also a spirit of wisdom : wisdom and spirit of the universe.' This is pre-eminently manifest in the offices which she performs in her relations to man.

Nature, according to Wordsworth, sustains important relations to Man. She builds and shapes human personal-

ity by operating especially through Man's moral emotions ; She acts as a moral teacher and guide to Man ; She furnishes visions of God, and of the spirit's eternal destiny to the communing, sympathetic mind ; she is a comforter and physician to Man.

In short, Wordsworth's faith is that there is a spiritual presence dwelling in all things and in the mind of Man. It is quickening power of both. As the soul of things it ministers in divers manners to the bodily, intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and even religious nature of Man. A critic writes, "Instead of cross Materialism, or a naive realism, the Poet gives us a spiritual interpretation of all Reality. Instead of a crude Deism, with merely a transcendent God, he gives us a world alive with the quickening power of an all-pervading spirit. Instead of an all-engulfing Pantheism he teaches the transcendence of God, while, at the same time, predicating his immanence—preserving, however, the reality and individuality of God, things and finite spirits, affirming their intimate relationship in a spiritual kingdom, and the gracious and beneficent ministry of the spirit in things to the spirit of Man. His is the theist faith in a spiritual universe, which our poet affirms with his whole mind and heart, and with which his poetry of Nature throbs."

As a descriptive poet, Wordsworth's treatment of nature is accurate and first-hand, not conventional or artificial. Wordsworth affirms that from Milton to Thomson no new contributions had been made to nature-images. The same stereotyped pictures, and their verbal symbols, were used by successive poets. (Wordsworth's eye for nature is always fresh and true, and what he sees

he describes with an admirable realism. His sense of form and colour is also perfect, and in nothing is he so great an artist as in his power of conveying in a phrase the exact truth of the things he sees.) When he speaks of the voice of the stock-dove as 'buried among trees' he uses the only word that could completely convey to us the idea of seclusion, the remote depth of greenwood in which the dove loves to hide herself. The star-shaped shadow of the daisy cast upon the stone is noted also with the same loving accuracy. (A cataract seen from a station two miles off is spoken of as 'frozen by distance.' Of sky-scenery, Wordsworth's observations are the most circumstantial.) The sublime scene indorsed upon the draperies of the storm in Book IV of the *Excursion*—that scene again witnessed upon the passage of the Hamilton Hills in Yorkshire—the solemn 'sky-prospect' from the fields of France, are unrivalled in that order of composition. Even the slightest of his poems have evidence of close observation :

" The cattle are grazing
 Their heads never raising ;
 There are forty feeding like one."

Truly has De Quincey said that scarcely has there been a poet with what could be called a learned eye, or an eye *extensively* learned, before Wordsworth. (His sense of sound is as perfect as his power of vision. Pater says, "Clear and delicate at once, as he is in the outlining of visible imagery, he is more clear and delicate still, and finely scrupulous, in the noting of sounds") so that he conceives of noble sound as even moulding the human countenance to nobler types, and as something actually "profaned"

by colour, by visible form, or image. Further "he has a power of realising, and conveying to the consciousness of the reader, abstract and elementary impressions—silence, darkness, absolute emotionless; or, again, the whole complex sentiment of a particular place, the abstract expression of desolation in the long white road, of peacefulness in a particular folding of the hills." Take the following lines :—

" The single sheep, and that one blasted tree,
And the bleak music of that old stone wall."

The wild wind-swept summit of a mountain could hardly be better painted than in this word-picture. We feel at once the desolation of the scene, and we catch its spirit. Or who, as De Quincey points out before Wordsworth ever distinctly noticed the *abstracting* power of twilight ?

But it must be remembered that Wordsworth's observation is not simple observation. He scorned what he called taking an inventory of Nature, and said that Nature did not permit it. His comment on a brilliant poet was, "He should have left his pencil and note-book at home fixed his eye as he walked with a reverent attention on all that surrounded him, and taken all into a heart that could understand and enjoy. He would have discovered that while much of what he had admired was preserved to him much was also most wisely obliterated; that which remained—the picture surviving in his mind—would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene, and done so in a large part by discarding much which, though in itself striking, was not characteristic." This was Wordsworth's own method. When he has observed he allows the picture of what he has seen to sink quietly into

the memory and he broods over it in silent joy. The result is that when the hour comes to combine his materials in a poem, they are already sifted for us, and are saturated with sentiment. Many of the noblest passages in Wordsworth might be described as unusually accurate observation touched with the finest and purest emotion. The difference between the best descriptive passages in Thomas or Cowper and those of Wordsworth is just the difference between mere veracity and spiritual truth, or between eloquence and pure poetry. The truthfulness of Wordsworth's observation comes from a faculty higher than mere observation, which ever taught him what he was to observe, and what he was to pass by as unworthy of observation—"the Imaginative Faculty, Lord of observations natural." A critic says, "The true artist idealises by a process the opposite of the false artist. The latter adds to what he copies something which he fancies to be flattering, but which is commonly incongruous and unmeaning; the true artist takes away what is accidental, and what remains is the characteristic and the true." Similarly, in delineations of Nature, the poet's function is to create, while he copies, by seeing the truth and representing it stripped of disguise. This is what Wordsworth did. A peculiar variety of his descriptive poetry is represented by such poem as "Influence of Natural Objects" and "Yew Trees"—in which observation becomes mastered by the imaginative, seeing Nature with an eye that more than half-creates, and adding to Nature's truth "The light that never was on 'sea or land, the consecration and the poet's dream." Even in him, however, such description is exceptional. The nature which he

loves best to describe is nature which has ministered to God's creatures and mirrored human life.

But it is not mere fact of his being a poet of nature that makes him unique. As R. H. Hutton says, "His special poetic faculty lies, I think, in contemplatively seizing the characteristic individual *influences* which all living things, from the very smallest of earth or air, up to man and the spirit of God, radiate around them to every mind that will surrender itself to their expressive power. It is not true that Wordsworth's genius lay mainly in the region of mere Nature ;—rather say it lay in defecting Nature's influences just at the point where they were stealing unobserved into the very essence of the human soul. Nor is this all. His characteristic power lay no less in discovering divine influences, as they fall like dew upon the spirit. One may say that Wordsworth's poetry is fed on sympathy *less*, and on influences from *natures differing in kind* from his own *more*, than any other poetry in the world ; and that he delineates these influences just as they are entering into the very substance of humanity. (Strike out the human element from his Nature poems, and they lose all their meaning ; he did not paint Nature, like Tennyson ; he arrested and interpreted its spiritual expressions.")

According to Aldous Huxley, the Wordsworth adoration of Nature has two principal defects : one that it is only possible in a country where Nature has been nearly or quite enslaved to man, for a voyage through the tropics would have cured him of his too easy and comfortable pantheism ; the other that it is only possible for those who are prepared to falsify their immediate intuitions of

Nature, for Wordsworth, Procrustes-like, tortured his feelings and perceptions until they fitted his system. He says that the change in Wordsworth's attitude towards Nature is symptomatic of his general apostasy. Beginning as a natural aesthete, he transformed himself, in the course of years, into a moralist, a thinker. He used his intellect to distort his exquisitely acute and subtle intuitions of the world, to explain away their often disquieting strangeness, to simplify them into a comfortable metaphysical unreality.

Wordsworth's interpretation of Nature has been taken seriously in our time. A. N. Whitehead in 'Science and the Modern World,' declares his approach to Nature, the approach through imaginatively exacted sensibility, to be as indispensable as the scientific approach, by way of experiment and deductive reasoning, to a complete account of her.

As a poet of Man, Wordsworth was in a measure unique. There is something individual in the way in which he was led through love of Man. Nature, he tells us in the *Prelude*, held for long an exclusive place in his affections. But when he visited London, he is impressed with 'the unity of man.' As he approaches on his 'itinerant vehicle,' 'a weight of ages' descends at once upon 'his heart.' He becomes aware, that, besides the mountains and the lakes, there is a vast drama of human joy and suffering constantly developing itself. Next he visits France, and there by the Loire-side, at Blois, he feels the call of human pity; and at Orleans, yet sooner, the call of human passion; and passion and pity, never experienced by him in like

measure before, co-operate in bringing about the change of perspective by which Man 'in my affections and regards' ceases to be subordinate to Nature. He sets himself to understand, as far as he could the human agency which co-operates with external powers and makes beauty and grandeur possible, till he is able to teach

"How the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, mid all revolution in the hopes
And fears of man, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of quality and fabric more divine."

It must, however, be kept in mind that when in his despondency at the ill consequences of the French Revolution, Wordsworth had turned away from the works of Man to seek and find comfort in the works of Nature, it was Nature that led him back, with more composed and surer feelings, to consider Man once more.

(But Wordsworth considers not the Man of the politicians, the statists and the moralists,) but the individual man, "the man whom we behold with our own eyes"—and here also there is something unique. He believed that he had put his finger on the real secret of the unsatisfied passions and misery of mankind when he taught that man, divorced from living intercourse with Nature, could not but be restless and unhappy. (Man was set in this world of Nature because the world of Nature was necessary to his well-being and because spiritual sanity and delight were not possible without contact with Nature. Says Raleigh, "solitary man, under the spreading sky, in

living contact with the earth, and governed by the simple, stern necessities of his daily outdoor existence, was conceived by Wordsworth with a depth of insight and a sympathy that no other poet has achieved.) Wordsworth's men are spirits of the Earth, wrought upon by the elements from which they are compounded. Hence in his descriptions of humanity there is a kind of magic purity; the influences of earth and sky are everywhere felt in human feature and character. (The imaginative fusion of Nature and Man was with Wordsworth so complete that he came to see a close affinity between the ordinances of Nature and the highest human virtues.") So also Pater, "And it was through nature, thus ennobled by a semblance of passion and thought, that he approached the spectacle of human life. Human life, indeed, is for him, at first, only an additional, accidental grace on an expressive landscape. When he thought of man, it was of man as in the presence and under the influence of these effective natural objects, and linked to them by many associations. (The close connexion of man with natural objects,) the habitual association of his thoughts and feelings with a particular spot of earth, has sometimes seemed to degrade those who are subject to its influence, as if it did but reinforce that physical connexion of our nature with the actual lime and clay of the soil, which is always drawing us nearer to our end. (But for Wordsworth, these influences tended to the dignity of human nature, because they tended to tranquillise it.) By raising nature to the level of human thought he gives it power and expression: he subdues man to the level of nature, and gives him thereby a certain breadth and coolness and

solemnity. The leech-gatherer on the moor, the woman "stepping westward" are for him natural objects, almost in the same sense as the aged thorn, or the lichened rock on the heath. In this sense the leader of the "Lake School," in spite of an earnest preoccupation with man, his thoughts, his destiny, is the poet of nature." So in his proper environment of Nature, Wordsworth saw that man was at his best, and he regarded him with genuine reverence. There is no poet who shows so great a reverence for man, *as man*. He sings the homely sanctities and virtues of the poor. He finds his theme in the qualities that are common to all men. The persons of his stories have no habits of mind that are necessarily connected with their occupations; they are not drawn as clearly marked types; much less are they individuals. They are simply men, old or young, or women, or children, as nature makes them, and as little affected as may be by the conventions of society. John Morley has rightly observed, "simplification was the keynote of the revolutionary time." That lesson Wordsworth thoroughly learned, and never forgot. It is the very essence of the democratic spirit to pierce beneath the artificial distinctions of a time, and grasp the essential; to take man for what he is, not for what he seems to be; to reverence man wherever he is found, and to reverence not least the man who toils in the lowliest walks of life. Wordsworth was a keen psychologist, endeavouring to discover what Man is when stripped of the artificiality due to the conventions and institutions of society—what the "feelings and passions" are which constitute his fundamental life. And it was among these simple folk that he believed the

essentials of our common nature are to be found. It has therefore been said that Wordsworth's range is narrow. He is the poet of man, alone, facing the sublimities and simplicities of Nature, or of men and women who are a portion of these simplicities.) Man in Society, in Cities, and the State, he does not know. He takes us once to the gates of a factory, he describes London with the eyes of a friendless countryman; but to tell of the 'sorrow barricaded within the walls of cities' remained the unfulfilled program of a recluse.

Wordsworth was a lover of the poor and lowly, and a Champion of their rights and interests. He sympathized with them in their suffering, and did honour to their fidelity and spirit of endurance, their patience and resignation, under it. And the poems which are the outcome of this love are, for tenderness and pathos, for genuine passion and sympathy, remarkable feats. Says Aubrey de Vere, "It is the broad, rough life of man that confronts us, not the life of the sentimentalist; its trials are those which come through the universal affections, neither sensualised on the one hand, nor sophisticated and volatilised on the other: and their challenge reaches us through no euphemistic dialect, but the *vulgare eloquenza* of natural speech." We have, for example, Ruth, the deserted bride, the deserted mother, the "Complaint of a forsaken Indian woman," "The Brothers," the tale of Margaret, the "Solitary," "Michael," "The Affliction of Margaret," "The White Doe of Rylstone,"—poems in which we find ourselves in the presence of poverty, crime, insanity, ruined innocence, torturing hopes doomed to extinction, solitary anguish, even despair. It is therefore wrong to

say that Wordsworth put by the cloud of human destiny.
Not only isolated expressions as

“ The still sad music of humanity ”

or

“ Amid the groves, under the shadowy hills,
The generations are prepared ; the pangs,
The internal pangs, are ready ; the dread strife
Of poor humanity's afflicted will
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.”

but a number of stories such as mentioned above reveal a dark world. Wordsworth has sounded the depths of the human heart, and seems to appreciate and understand nearly every phase of human woe. Yet he endeavours to show that sometimes pain and wrong are the conditions of a happiness and good which without them could not have been, that no limit can be set to the power of the soul to transmute them into its own substance, and that, in suffering and even in misery, there may still be such a strength as fills us with awe or with glory. Man's heart is represented as a thing so vast and swelling with vital emotion so strong that whatever its trials, it can never be crushed. Wordsworth's poetical temperament combined great susceptibility and tenderness with not less of strength and vivacity. The general view which he takes of human life is eminently a cheerful one and he commends that poetry alone

“ Whose spirit, like the angel that went down
Into Bethesda's pool, with healing virtue
Informs the fountain in the human breast
That by the visitation was disturbed.”

Furthermore, Wordsworth guards the moral claims of lowly folk against the evils of the social order. He makes an earnest protest against an industrial system that destroys the *moral* equality of men. (Men must be regarded as ends in themselves, not means or tools.

“How dire a thing,
Is worshipped in that idol, proudly named
The ‘Wealth of Nations.’”

He dwells upon the evils of large estates and the factory system in the *Excursion* in language which foreshadows Socialism.

Again, within the sphere of politics, he exhibits unusual qualities as a poet of Man. To say nothing of his prose writings, few poets have given us a larger body of patriotic poetry, and poetry impregnated with politics. His patriotism was no splendid prejudice, no insularity of thought, no mere sentimental love of country : it gathered in its embrace the passions of Europe, and pleaded in its strenuous eloquence the cause of the oppressed throughout the world. It was characterised by a breadth of view and founded on principles of universal truth and righteousness. There is sanity in his political fervour and a rich ethical vein runs through this part of his nature. Moral ideals dominate his views and feelings. A profound love of country is tempered with a sublime sense of duty, which makes him bold to rebuke his own Nation for shortcomings and failures. His social grasp is always surer than his political, however, and his finest sonnets are those in which he combines his social insight with patriotic passion. He fears the enervation of prosperity more than the buffetings of adversity ; and he fears that England which has saved

the liberties of Europe might fall into inglorious self-indulgence. Hence his appeal to "Sidney, Marvel, Harrington," who

'knew how genuine glory is put on,
Taught us how rightfully a nation shone
In splendour, what strength was that would not bend
But in magnanimous weakness ;'

to Milton, whose "soul was as a star and dwelt apart."
He scorns the thought

"That this most famous stream in bogs and sands
Should perish ! and to evil and to good
Be lost for ever. In our halls is hung
Armoury of the invincible knights of old ;
We must be free or die, who speaks the tongue
That Shakespeare spoke : the faith and morals hold
Which Milton held. In everything we are sprung
Of earth's first blood ; have titles manifold."

The patriotism of Wordsworth is not violent or frenzied ; it is comparatively restrained ; but for that very reason, in the moments of its highest utterance there is a depth and force in it such as few writers display. F. W. Myers truly says of the 'poems dedicated to National Independence and Liberty' that they "are worthy of comparison with the noblest passages of patriotic verse or prose which all our history has inspired—the passages where Shakespeare brings his rays to focus on 'this earth, this realm, this England'—or where the dread of national dishonour has kindled Chatham to an iron glow—or where Milton rises from the polemic into the prophet, and Burke from the partisan into the philosopher. The armoury of Wordsworth, indeed, was not forged with the same fire

as that of these 'invincible knights of old ! He had not swayed senates, nor directed policies, nor gathered into one ardent bosom all the spirit of a heroic age. But he had deeply felt what it is that makes the greatness of nations ; in that extremity no man was more staunch than he ; no man more unwaveringly disdained unrighteous empire, or kept the might of moral forces more steadfastly in view. Not Stein could place a manlier reliance on, 'a few strong instincts and a few plain rules' ; not Fichte could invoke more convincingly the 'great allies' which work with 'Man's unconquerable mind.' "

In the *Excursion* his conclusions, involving a recognition of the Christian solution of problems, are independently reached. His conviction that the "one adequate support for the calamities of mortal life" is belief in a beneficent God, who overrules all things for good, in the reality of virtue, and in the soul's imperishable worth, was not a blind adoption of traditional or generally accepted views, but a conviction born of serious meditation on the more mysterious aspects of human life.

Morley says that Wordsworth "had not rooted in him the sense of Fate, of the inexorable sequence of things, of the terrible chain that so often binds an awful end to some slight and trivial beginning." It is difficult to agree with this judgment. There is no flinching in Wordsworth. In his meditation there is a rare frankness in his concessions to pessimism. But with the sense of fate Wordsworth had a conviction that in man there is something intended to defy fate, and to writing even from 'the inexorable sequences of things' a strength greater than the strength of fate, which fate cannot crush. Wordsworth

had convinced himself that even where fate oppresses, it oppresses to show—

‘ that consolation spring

From sources deeper far than deepest pain ,
and he carried about with him the passionate exaltation of that conviction. He anticipates Browning in this respect. To be ‘one with Nature’ meant for Wordsworth, not as with Shelley, to have a living part in her songs and springs, but to be

“Rolled round in Earth’s diurnal course

With rocks and stones and trees,”

a portion of her silent undeviating endurance. Stoic endurance, in the human worlds allied man to the undeviating uniformities of natural law. Herford remarks, (“At no time is there a sharp clearage between his poetry of Nature and his poetry of Man. Through Man and Nature alike rolls the divine ‘something’ more deeply inter-fused, and his apprehension of both is inspired and coloured only by the same instincts and appetencies, so that Wordsworthian Nature and Wordsworthian Man appear profoundly akin : ‘characters’ of the same great ‘Apocalypse’ in a different context.”)

As a poet of pathos, Wordsworth has hardly any equal.

As a poet of pathos. In this connection, we may refer to such poems as the three on Yarrow, “The Solitary Reaper,”

“To the Cuckoo,” “Tintern Abbey,” “Animal Tranquillity and Decay,” “A Farewell,” “The small Celandine,” the poems on the daisy, “A Poet’s Epitaph,” “Simon Lee,” “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” etc. The tears which Wordsworth’s pathos brings to the eyes are often tears of gladness strangely mingled with regret—

" The sighs which Matthew heaved were sighs
 Of one tired out with fun and madness ;
 The tear which came to Matthew's eyes
 Were tears of light, the dew of gladness
 Yet ofttimes, when the secret cup
 Of still and serious thought went round
 It seemed as if he drank it up—
 He felt with spirit so profound."

The two poems on "Matthew" are admirable specimens of Wordsworth's pathos in its most usual form. Wordsworth begins by picturing the profound unspeakable sadness with which we think of the days that are no more, but no sooner does he touch this theme than he checks the current of emotion and 'instead of being restlessly propelled' by it, he makes it the object of contemplation, and "with no unconquerable sighs, yet with a melancholy in the soul, sinks inward into himself, from thought to thought, to a steady remonstrance and a high resolve "

" My eyes are dim with childish tears,
 My heart is idly stirred ;
 For the same sound is in my Ears
 Which in those days I heard
 Thus fares it still in our decay ;
 And yet the wiser mind
 Mourns less for what age takes away
 Than what it leaves behind."

The pathos of Wordsworth's poems is never feeble or splenetic. It is touching in its majesty. The pathos of 'Michael,' of "The Leech-Gatherer," of "Elegiac Stanzas suggested by a picture of Peel Castle" unites the strong and the touching. In such poems as the sonnet on his

daughter Catharine beginning, "Surprised by joy—impatient as the wind," the sonnet commemorating Sarah Hutchinson which begins, "Even so for me a vision sanctified," on the departure of Scott from Abbotsford, the sonnet beginning, "A point of life between my parents' dust," the sonnet to the pine-tree on Monte Marid, at Rome, the two sonnets addressed to the portrait of his wife painted by Miss Gillies, the stanzas beginning, "'Tis said that some have died for love," Wordsworth blends sweetness with solemn pathos. In Lucy poems, on the other extreme, pathos enters the province of the sublime. Wordsworth thus travels the whole gamut of it—the sharper strain, the milder strain, the harrowing strain.

It is difficult to agree with Morley's view, that it is more as teacher and less as pure poet that **Passion in his poetry.** Wordsworth is most admirable. It is true that "there are great tracts in Wordsworth which by no definition and on no terms can be called poetry." True also that "Wordsworth hardly knows how to be stern as Dante or Milton was stern; nor has he the note of plangent sadness which strikes the ear in men so morally inferior to him as Rousseau, Keats, Shelley, or Coleridge; nor has he the Olympian air with which Goethe delivered sage oracles." But where else in *genuine* 'poetic quality'—though it is genuine poetic quality of a somewhat unique and limited if infinitely lofty kind, and not one which includes either 'depth and variety of colour,' or "penetrating and subtle sweetness of music"—in the variety and vitality of pure poetic expression can we find a greater than Wordsworth unless it be in Shakespeare. Aubrey de Vere has very successfully maintained

in an essay that Wordsworth's passion is passion of the most genuine kind. But, then, as R. H. Hutton aptly points out, its proper field is a field which hardly any poet but himself knows how to enter at all. "It introduces us to a sort of fourth dimension in the poetic world, to a previously untravelled region of poetry where Wordsworth lives almost alone, and nearly every other poet is simply nowhere." Byron's poems ring perpetual changes upon one passion and one phase of passion. The loftiest joys they paint are the thrilling of the sense, the raptures of a fine nervous organisation; their pathos is the regret, and their wisdom the langour and the satiety of a jaded voluptuary. Shelley dwells in rapturous anticipation on the coming of the golden year, the reign of universal freedom, and the establishment of universal brotherhood. But Shelley's rapture does not exalt him, as it exalts Wordsworth, into a sphere for power and loftier than his own. It is true that in Wordsworth's highest strain there is always, the note of 'volition and self-government but, as a critic points out, that indicates the theme rather than the poetic force or movement. Wordsworth prepared himself by an ascetic effort of heart and will to receive a particular kind of rapture, but when the rapture came, it flowed spontaneously, and then Wordsworth was able to express what Bagehot so finely described as "the lonely rapture of lonely mind,"—a rapture of solitude which no voluntary power possesses the spell to summon up. Other poets produce passion by introducing us to a region of moonlight fancies and dainty distresses, by emotional spasms, and by glittering images, by gleams of fancy and by pompous ostentation. But in Wordsworth's hands ordinary

things become extraordinary because he sees in them depths and heights not suspected. Passion is not appetite. It is profound and intense feeling that unravels the tangled skein of human ties and next deals with remoter objects, whether above or around us, so far as they can be coloured by human imagination and emotion. Genuine poetic passion, when dealing with man, must show the depth and preciousness and the infinitude which belong to all the bonds of earthly life divinely created. And Wordsworth is great because his poems perform this function powerfully. If we exclude from passion all that might more properly be called either sensuous instinct or sensational energy, and if we regard it as it exists in its profounder form, we shall see that passion, far from being absent from Wordsworth's poetry, is a conspicuous feature of it. There is passion that brings pleasure; and there is passion that ministers to virtue and does not shrink from pain. It is the latter which Wordsworth illustrates, and succeeds there eminently because the general view which he takes of human life is eminently a cheerful one—so cheerful, indeed, that he can well afford to allow the shadow to intermingle with the light. "Throughout his poetry man's heart with its boundless sympathies and boundless capacities for pleasure and for pain is represented as a thing so vast, and swelling with vital emotion so strong, that whatever its trials, it can never be crushed. It has nothing of the hard lightness which belongs, to the epicurean. Its sensibilities are, indeed, so fine that it must needs suffer much, but its elasticity is greater, and therefore in its rebound it must ever throw off suffering, and confess that all things around us are 'full of blessings.' Wordsworth's

poetry has indeed been admired for its wisdom and truth and for its spotless purity. But if it had possessed these merits unmixed with passion, it would have lost its chief feature—a passion that obscures not and destroys not, but is that ‘unconsuming fire of light’ which clarifies and brightens all that it touches.” Herbert Read remarks, “Outwardly he was cold, even hard. Inwardly he was all fire. But true to his type, he was not going to give himself away. Not even in his poetry, not even in the most inspired moments of his creative activity. Passion, of course, does blaze from many of a poem of Wordsworth’s; but not the direct passion of profane love, not even the direct passion of sacred love, but passion transmuted into impersonal things—rocks, and stones, and trees.” Pater says, “And so he has much for those who value highly the concentrated presentment of passion...He chooses to depict people from humble life, because, being nearer to nature than others, they are on the whole more impassioned, certainly more direct in their expression of passion than other men.”

It has been asked why, when Wordsworth’s nature was so impassioned, he left so little love-poetry behind him. Wordsworth is reported to have replied to Aubrey de Vere, “Had I been a writer of love-poetry, it would have been natural to me to write it with a degree of warmth which could hardly have been approved by my principles, and which might have been undesirable for the reader.” In “The Poet and the caged Turtle Dove,” he says :

His love-poetry.

“Love, blessed love, is everywhere
The *spirit* of my song.”

His genius was both ardent and serene ; and he preferred those themes which moved him without disquieting him. If he wrote few love-poems, properly so called, he wrote many poems which give the best praise to love by giving the most charming pictures of the lovely and the lovable—"Three Cottage Girls," the "Highland Girl," "The Triad." The poems about Lucy are love-poems ; the verses *'Tis said that some have died for love* are poignant enough ; some lines of *Vandracour and Julia* are haunting. Bradley remarks, "The main reason for doubting whether, if he had made the attempt, he would have reached his highest level, is that, so far as we can see, he did not strongly feel—perhaps hardly felt at all—that the *passion* of love is a way into the infinite ; and a thing must be no less than this to Wordsworth if it is to rouse all his power. Byron, it seemed to him, had

‘dared to take

Life's rule from passion craved for passion's sake ;' and he utterly repudiated that." Wordsworth craved objects that endure and we now know that his own love for Annette did not endure. Wordsworth was suffering from a suppressed passion and we realise anew the significance of his statement to Aubrey de Vere. Miss Fenwick thus describes him in his sixty-ninth year : "What strange workings are there in his great mind ! How fearfully strong are all his feelings and affections ! If his intellect had been less powerful they must have destroyed him long ago."

A word may here be said on Wordsworth's poetry of childhood, Wordsworth does not, like Blake, become a child himself ; he writes like a philosopher. Not in play but in deep earnest

**As a poet of
childhood.**

he dwells on the awfulness, the wonder, the sacredness of childhood ; it furnishes in his hands the subject, not only of touching ballads, but of one of the most magnificent lyrical poem—the ode on *Immortality*. Some poems are founded on incidents of his conversation with them, as *We are Seven*, *Anecdote for Fathers*, *Beggars*. These poems derive all their interest from the dramatic situation, “the game of cross-purposes played between the poet and the oracles whom he consulted.” He found that children were indifferent to the things on which he was brooding and therefore, thought he, they have a more direct access to the truth. He addresses the child in the *Ode* as

“ thou Eye among the blind
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind.”

How does Wordsworth relate Nature to human nature ? Firstly, by the use of country scenes and of external nature as an escape from the ills that man is heir to, as in the well-known invocation of sleep, ‘A flock of sheep that leisurely pass by...,’ or in the address to Wansfell ; secondly by introducing nature into poems that are either concerned with definite human beings or that exhibit creative fancy and constructive imagination by way of similes ; thirdly by half-mythological creations of his fancy, the anthropomorphic way in which he personalises his phenomena, as in the *Ode to May*, in the sonnet ‘By the sea-side,’ in the *Ode to the Clouds*, in the poem on the Simplon Pass ; fourthly by the use of personification in which Law is regarded as guiding and ruling two realms—the ‘human’ realm and the ‘natural.’

As a lyric poet Wordsworth marks the conversion of the lyrical to the sub-lyrical, of the verse of sung-melody and pure vocal rhythm to that of reflective and meditative expression. With Burns the art of the song almost came to an end. The 'philosophic mind' and the demands of a poetry that should be related to the insensory self, drove away the lyric of mere passion and the vocal idea, and set in its place something subjective and meditative. If we compare Burns' 'Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet' to Wordsworth's lines on Chatterton and on Burns in the 'Leech-Gatherer' we shall realise the truth of Hazlitt's statement that "Nothing can be more different or hostile than the spirit of their poetry." Wordsworth truly knew the music of the mind; the mere tonic music of the ear, as a thing apart from poetry, he did not know. He wrote poetry at a second remove from music; he expressed the emotional state not simply by the musical equivalence of the words but also by their significance, their colour and light and power, their associational value. Herbert Read points out that in the line. 'The still sad music of humanity,' though its music echoes in exact equivalence, the emotional perception the words express, the main force of the line comes from the conjunction of a purely emotive phrase like 'still sad music' with a word of vague but immense associations like 'humanity.' Similarly, a simile like :

"The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration...."

depends for its peculiar effect on the imagery associated with the word 'Nun.' In Wordsworth poetry depends on

the mental reverberations aroused by words and not merely on their sound—some poems of course there are in which sound does the chief work. Such are, for instance, *The Green Linnet* and *The Solitary Reaper*. Most of Wordsworth's poems are written 'in retrospect'; they describe the revival in 'tranquillity' of an emotion formerly experienced. The result is that the reflective or ethical element intervenes, deepening the idea yet lowering the flame. We do not have in Wordsworth the beauty of Shelley's more immediate song, the song of inarticulate rapture and of freezing pain,—of a blinding light of truth and a dazzling weight of glory, translated into English speech, as coloured as a painted window, as suggestive, as penetrating, as intense as music. Wordsworth's purely lyrical power is at its highest pitch in ballads that are dramatic such as the *Affliction of Margaret*.

A large body of Wordsworth's writing lies in the middle or 'neutral' zone of diction, where the vocabulary, the order and the syntax of the words are as close to prose as the presence of metre permits, while yet the work is indubitably poetical. In this zone, as Coleridge points out, Wordsworth moves with delight and steady power. A good example of this sort of writing is in *The Brothers*. Below this zone comes the perilously and needlessly prosaic, thrust in by his doctrine and not by his genius,—such as most of *Goody Blake* and of the *Idiot Boy*, some of *Simon Lee* and *The Thorn*, a good deal of external narrative in the *Prelude*, the dry passages of the *Excursion*, flat lines like these,

"Not less do I remember to have felt
Distinctly manifested at this time,"

A human-heartedness about my love
For objects hitherto the absolute wealth
Of my own private being and no more,"

or these

"Near the stately Pantheon you'll meet with the same,
In the street that from Oxford hath borrowed its name."

On the upper limit of the neutral zone, we have the more
exalted and elaborate styles, as in this

'Amid the groves, under the shadowy hills,
The generations are prepared ; the pangs,
The internal pangs, are ready,'

or in this from the *Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg*,

"Like clouds that rake the mountain-summits,
Or waves that own no curbing hand,
How fast has brother followed brother
From sunshine to the sunless land !"

or in the political poems and in all those pictures of life
which depict the unconquerable power of affection,
passion, resolution, patience, or faith. Outside these three
zones, we have in Wordsworth some fine flowers of
eighteenth-century meditative and speculative poetry,—
such as *Tintern Abbey*, the sonnet *Mutability*, *Yew Trees*,
and this from the *Excursion* :

"Then my soul
Turned inward,—to examine of what stuff
Times fetters are composed ; and life was put
To inquisition long and profitless !
By pain of heart—now checked—and now impelled—
The intellectual power, through words and things,
Went scurding on, a dim and perilous way !"

Wordsworth may be said to have redeemed the metaphysical style in verse. He was using a current eighteenth-century kind—the common kind of Young, Akenside, and Johnson, and Thomson but he used it differently.

Wordsworth's style is, generally speaking, hard of texture, strong, pure and natural ; and for his purpose and in relation to his chosen subjects it was perhaps the best. While passion holds him, while he is moved or exalted, his language keep its naked intensity. At such moments, ornamental excrescences disappear and all adornment appears a profanation ; the diction becomes artless and simple and emotion dictates its own rhythm. Wordsworth came near to this style so often that, in Raleigh's words, he has almost earned the right to a definition of his style as continuous fabric of great imaginative moments. Everywhere when his deepest and sincerest feelings are touched, his language answers to them, and becomes simpler more matter-of-fact a bare transcript of experience, without commentary. The best examples are the Lucy poem beginning 'A slumber did my spirit seal' and that beginning 'Among thy mountains did I feel.' It is even found in a description of Peter Bell's journeys on foot

“ Through Yorkshire dales,
Among the rocks and winding scars ;
Where deep and low the hamlets lie
Beneath their little patch of sky
And little lot of stars.”

Pater says, “ In him, when the really poetic motive works at all, it united, with absolute justice, the word and the idea ; each, in the imaginative flame, becoming inseparably

one with the other, by that fusion of matter and form, which is the characteristic of the highest poetical expression. His words are themselves thought and feeling; not eloquent, or musical words merely, but that sort of creative language which carries the reality of what it depicts, directly, to the consciousness." Another critic says, "He founded, more than any single writer a way of writing that is strong, pure and usually plain, but it is also strong and pure when it is splendid. Hence he is a 'poet's poet' as well as a poet for us all; and he remains one who has earned the right to be described as 'the acknowledged voice of life.'"

Of all the romantic poets, Wordsworth has, in the largest measure, the Miltonic grandeur of style. Wordsworth alone, combining fine artistic power with profound religion, walks when he chooses, though he limps wretchedly at times, with nearly as stately a step as Milton. He had the two qualities which always go with the grand style in poetry—he lived intensely in the present, and he had the roots of his being fixed in a great centre of power—faith in the eternal righteousness and love of God. Much of Wordsworth is of a Roman or Miltonic severity—he is 'Classical' in that sense. Says R. W. Church, "In his most fiery moments of inspiration and enthusiasm he never allowed himself to relax his hold on reality and truth: as he would scorn to express in poetry any word or feeling which was not genuine and natural, any sentiment or impulse short of or beyond the actual impression which caused them, so with the most jealous strictness he measured his words. He gave them their full swing if they answered to force and passion; but he watched them

all the same, with tender but manly severity. Hence with his power and richness of imagination, and his full command over all the resources of voice and ear, an austere purity and plainness and nobleness marked all that he wrote, and formed a combination as distinct as it was uncommon. To purity, purity of feeling, pure truthfulness, he is never untrue."

Wordsworth's versification reveals his want of self-judgment and his rhythm is not perpetual like that of Spenser or Swinburne. With him, metre is but an additional grace, accessory to the deeper music of words and sounds. His metrical power and inventiveness are fitful, though at times very high. Some of his pieces like the *Daffodils* and *The two April Mornings*, are distinguished by a certain quaint gaiety of metre and rival the Elizabethan poetry in execution. Wordsworth's masterly and sometimes splendid manipulation of the various ballad-like measures, of the irregular ode, of the stanzaic ode, and of the pathetic measure of the *Extempore Effusion*, is manifest.

His blank verse is capricious in its power. Oliver Elton says, "Though he went back for his music to Milton, Milton's heroic line too often reached him through the deadening chorus of Milton's imitators, as through a wall of felt." But Wordsworth often succeeds. In *Tintern Abbey* he uses the same kind of blank verse as that of Akenside and Thomson but it is more nobly sustained and cleared of frigid fiction. *Michael* has a slow and measured pace, and is strong and solid in its workmanship. Occasionally Wordsworth can build up a sure, a concerted, and a varied music of his own :

“Near,

The solid mountain shone, bright as the clouds,
Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light ;
And in the meadows and the lower grounds
Was all the sweetness of a common down—
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
And labourers going forth to till the fields.”

Wordsworth succeeds best when he is abstract or meditative. Occasionally he gives us a wonderful piece of verbal melody such as we find in his description of skating in the *Prelude* :

“So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
And not a voice was idle ; with the din
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud ;
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron ; while for distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy not unnoticed, while the stars
Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.”

The greatest defect of Wordsworth's style is that it is inconstant. There are sudden and unprepared transitions from lines or sentences of peculiar felicity to a style, not only unimpassioned but undistinguished—Coleridge points out that in the *Excursion* the feeling of incongruity is seldom excited by the diction of any passage considered in itself, but by the sudden superiority of some other passage forming the context. 'There are no more prosy passages in English verse than some of those where Wordsworth has an explanation to interpolate, a mechanical junction to

His characteristic defect.

effect, or a narrative to carry on to the next place where reflection may rest and brood. In these passages, while he is simple, he is often feeble and talkative. But sometimes, on the other hand, he endeavours to make it good by forced decoration and fancy, as in the beginning of his poem on *Water-fowl* :

“ Mark how the feathered tenants of the flood,
With grace of motion that might scarcely seem
Inferior to angelical, prolong
Their curious pastime ! ”

In Book I of the *Prelude*, again, every device of fanciful elaboration is bestowed on the description of the soiled and imperfect packs of cards which helped to beguile the long winter evenings of his boyhood in the Lakes. The following lines are a good criticism of Wordsworth's composition in general.

“ 'Tis a speech
That by a language of familiar lowness
Enhances what of more heroic vein
Is next to follow. But one fault it hath ;
It fits too close to life's realities
In truth to Nature missing truth to Art ;
For Art commends not counterparts and copies,
But from our life a nobler life would shape,
Bodies celestial from terrestrial raise,
And teach us not jejunely what we are,
But what we may be, when the Parian block
Yields to the hand of Phidias.”

(*A Sicilian Summer*, by Henry Taylor).

Wordsworth wrote with unequal power and felicity. His power was in bursts. A critic aptly remarks, “ There is

no poet in whom inspiration is more evident; there is none in whom it is less constant." That is why Matthew Arnold says that Wordsworth has no assured poetic style of his own. That is also one reason why he failed to compose a great philosophical poem. As R. W. Church says, "Strong as he was, he wanted that astonishing strength which carried Milton without flagging through his tremendous task."

Again Wordsworth's solid weight and massiveness of thought sometimes become oppressive, heavy, wearisome, even obscure. The *Excursion* is heavy-going, in spite of some very lofty passages and some moving stories. It wants the spring, the vividness of his earlier works. There is dignity and there is majesty, there is strength and there is depth; but there is also pompousness and ponderosity. Lowell says, "It cannot be denied that in Wordsworth the very highest powers of the poetic mind were associated with a certain tendency to the diffuse and commonplace. It is in the understanding (always prosaic) that the great golden veins of his imagination are embedded. He wrote too much to write always well: for it is not a great Xerxes-army of words but a compact Greek-ten-thousand that march safely down to posterity. He sets tasks to his divine faculty, which is much the same as trying to make Jove's eagle do the service of a clucking hen. Throughout the *Prelude* and the *Excursion* he seems striving to bind the wizard imagination with the sandropes of dry inquisition and to have forgotten the potent spell-word which would make the particles cohere. There is an arenaceous quality in the style which makes progress wearisome." Pater says, "For nowhere is there so perplexed a mixture

as in Wordsworth's own poetry, of work touched with intense and individual power, with work of almost no character at all...And those who wish to understand his influence, and experience his peculiar savour, must bear with patience the presence of an alien element in Wordsworth's work, which never coalesced with what is really delightful in it, nor underwent his special power. Who that values his writings most has not felt the intrusion there, from time to time, of something tedious and prosaic?" Pater wrote this in 1874 and since then, selections from Wordsworth's works have been made, with excellent taste, by Matthew Arnold and Professor Knight.

Coleridge has pointed out other 'characteristic defects' in Wordsworth's poetry,—such as overcare for minute painting of details which gives rise to a certain matter-of-factness in some poems; disproportion and incongruity between language and feeling, between matter and decoration; the tendency to spread out a dome of thought over very insufficient supports of fact—"thoughts and images too great for their subject." The last seems to be a mistaken criticism. The daisy and the daffodils breathed a buoyant joy and love into Wordsworth's simple nature which Coleridge could but half-understand.

The root cause of most of the defects in Wordsworth's poetry is that he was singularly deficient in humour. As a result of the intense meditation that he was used to concentrate on single centres of thought, his mind had become rigid. Myers accounts for a good part of Wordsworth's stiffness by his unpopularity. "The sense of humour is apt to be the first grace which is lost under persecution; and much of Wordsworth's heaviness and

stiff exposition of commonplaces is to be traced to a feeling which he could scarcely avoid, that all day long he had lifted up his voice to a perverse and gainsaying generation." We believe, however, that his unpopularity only *strengthened* a tendency in him. He was a "prophet of Nature," and as a prophet of Nature he had, like the prophets of God, a certain rapture of his own which rendered him insensible to humour. As the countryside said of him, he went 'booing about,' and had little or no room for that fine elasticity in passing from one mood to another which is of the essence of all humour. If he had any sense of humour, he would have perceived how absurd was his insistence on his theory of poetic expression in season and out of season and how ridiculous was his deliberate selection of poems like *The Idiot Boy* to illustrate his theory. It was lack of humour again that made him attach an overweening importance to the slightest incident in his own intellectual development and made him blind to the relative values of his poems, that made him insensible to incongruity and to the disproportion that so often strike us in his poetry. One half applies to him that fine verse

"There was a hardness in his cheek,
There was a hardness in his eye,
As though the man had fixed his face
In many a solitary place
Against the wind and open sky."

R. H. Hutton remarks "It was not only that he had 'fixed his face in many a solitary place against the wind and open sky,' but in the intellectual spaces it was the same. Against the infinite solitudes of the eternal world he had

intently fixed his spirit, till it too had something of the rigid attitude of the mystic, and was crossed at times by the dark spots which constant gazing at a great brightness will always produce. He paid for the frequency of 'the serene and blessed mood' by a want of ease and delicacy in the lesser movements of his intellectual nature, which rendered him often unable to bring the minutiae even of his finest poems into harmony with their spirit. Thus he often mistook the commonplace observations of his superficial understanding for the deeper thoughts of his heart; he had no living feeling that told him when he was dividing things with the blunt edge of commonsense, and when he was wielding that fine sword of the imagination by which to the discerning eye the poet divides asunder soul and spirit as surely as the greater sword divides for judgment. He would fall and rise in the same time from clear vision to the obscure gropings of commonsense—from obscure gropings to clear vision—and not feel the incongruity."

Further, Wordsworth, like other men, had his limitations. His field was narrow. Large tracts of human experience and feeling were unvisited by him and were beyond his horizon. He did not sing of war, or love, or tragic passions, or the actions of supernatural beings. But to describe his field as confined to external nature and peasant life, or to little and familiar things, would be untrue. As we have already seen, he has left some very good love-poems. In 'romance,' though it lay beyond Wordsworth's power to write an *Ancient Mariner*, or to tell us of 'magic casements opening on the foam of perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn,' we are not therefore to suppose that he was by

nature deficient in romance. His vehement defence in the *Prelude* of fairy-tales as food for the young, his delight in Arabian fiction, his dream of the Arab and the two books (*Prelude* V), his love of Spenser, his praise of the Osmunda fern as 'lovelier than Naiad by the side of Grecian brook, or Lady of the Mere sole-sitting by the shores of old romance,' his remarks on the Greek religion in the *Excursion* and his longing for the perished glory of Greek myth in the sonnet beginning 'The world is too much with us,' not to speak of his own peculiar dealing with the supernatural—all these indications are quite contrary to the customary notion that Wordsworth was incapable of writing romance. Again, in 'War,' if Wordsworth could not have rivalled the last Canto of *Marmion* or the best passages in the *Siege of Corinth*, the martial close of the *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle*, the martial parts of *The White Doe of Rylstone*, and the *Political Sonnets*, have plenty of animation and glory. Says Bradley. "Its author need not have shrunk from the subject of war if he had wished to handle it *con amore*." The fact is that Wordsworth deliberately chose not to do certain things; and we must not suppose that he was inherently incapable of doing what he would not do. As R. W. Church remarks, "He deliberately and with high purpose chose to forgo all that under the fascination of art might mislead or tempt." Had he desired, we feel that he could have done mighty things in these other spheres. But he elected to show mankind the divine light that shines from the face of the peasant, and the romance that breathes from the primrose or shimmers across the fluttering wings of the linnet. His peculiar function was 'to open out the

soul of little and familiar things,' alike in nature and in human life. His 'poetry is great because of the extraordinary power with which he feels the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties.' What he himself most valued in his attempts was the spirituality with which he had endeavoured to invest the material universe, and the moral relations under which he had wished to exhibit its most ordinary appearances. "Joy in widest commonalty spread" is his lesson. The world needs it still.

But of all poets whoever wrote, Wordsworth made his own self the subject of his own study. **His egotism.** Keats called his poetry 'the egotistical sublime' and Hazlitt observed: 'We do not think our author has any very cordial sympathy with Shakespeare. How should he? Shakespeare was the least of an egotist of anybody in the world.' Herbert Read pursues Hazlitt's contrast further and says, "Their contrast lies in their universality. For Wordsworth is only universal in the subjective apprehension of the phenomena of the universe. Whereas Shakespeare has an objective comprehension of human destiny. Wordsworth has no dramatic sense because he is his own hero and his destiny is the destiny of the world he contemplates and feels at one with. But over Shakespeare's world broods that spirit of fatality, that sense of opposition between man's desires and his destiny, which is the condition of all tragedy and the force of all dramatic values." What has given Wordsworth the reputation of an egotist is the peculiarly inward turn which his mind took, so that, instead of multiplying his points of relation with the world at large, as a poetic temperament usually

does multiply them, Wordsworth's genius appeared rather to shut him up in himself, and to separate him by the most separating medium in the world,—a totally alien method of regarding things from that of the wondering and observing world. He had the deepest human sympathies and affections; he had the keenest eye for all that was beautiful in Nature; but his poetic mode of treating his own feelings was altogether alien to method of the mass of mankind. He never gave direct expression to the feeling; rather he would restrain its immediate drift, however strong and stormy, till he could, after long musing and after bringing to bear a conscious, voluntary imaginative force upon it, find a peaceful and lucid reflection of it in the mirror of a quiet mind. We agree that there is a tone of egotism and individuality in some of Wordsworth's best compositions but when Hazlitt tries to prove that Wordsworth's poetic power is born of egotism and is part and parcel of his complete *want* of universality, we feel that Hazlitt took a sort of malicious delight in the paradox. Rather we agree with R. H. Hutton's statement that 'Half Wordsworth's weakness springs from the egotistical self. But all his power springs from a universal self.' It is an egotism, no doubt, when Wordsworth gives us a bare individual experience; but there is no egotism in delineating personal experience that helps to widen or renew the whole experience of others. Like Shakespeare's, though in his very different world, all Wordsworth's higher poems have a certain breadth of life and influence.

It was partly Wordsworth's lack of dramatic power that has given to his poetry the appearance of egotism.

His self-concentrated nature was incapable of projecting itself into the consciousness of other men and seeing the springs of action at their source in the recesses of individual character. In the *Excursion* where he made an effort to gather everything in, all the personages are the merest, shadows of himself: the Wanderer, who is Wordsworth's idea of the incarnation of his own poetic mind; the solitary, who is Wordsworth's idea of himself gone wrong; the Vicar, who is Wordsworth's idea of himself ordained, and the narrator, who is just Wordsworth. Wordsworth's personal experiences preceded nearly all his poetry. Everything he has written is deeply coloured with his own individuality. He has written little that is impersonal; across almost every page there is projected the huge shadow of his own peculiar personality. He found the impulse of poetry within himself; he brooded over the "abysmal deeps of personality" and from them he drew the inspiration of his noblest poetry. Yet, as Lowell says, through this very limitation of range he gains perhaps in intensity and the impressiveness which results from eagerness of personal conviction.

It has been said that Wordsworth is not the poet for young men. The mood of his finest poems is a retrospective mood and characterised by a pensive thoughtfulness, while a young man lives in the future and does not like to look back. His poetry again has a depth of intuition which makes only the best minds at their maturest capable of his companionship. In Wordsworth's poetry again a youth seeks in vain for wealth of colour, for startling and sensational effects, for casual brilliance. Words-

**Is he the poet
for young
men?**

worth belongs to grave and conscious life. To the mature man who has wearied of the theatrical glitter of Byron or the cloying sweetness of Keats, Wordsworth comes like the presence of Nature herself. He satisfies the heart; he inspires and stimulates the thought; he ennobles and invigorates us; he lays us on 'the cool flowery lap of earth;' his softer and soberer tones of colour soothe the eye and subdue the taste with a sense of infinite tranquillity.

There can be no doubt that for an intimate understanding of Wordsworth's poetry even a whole life-experience of an average man may prove inadequate. He is, in some respects, the most difficult of poets and needs to be approached along his own paths, and through moods and ways of thought akin to his own. Yet he is also extremely simple and if in his genius there was from the first a mature thoughtfulness, there was a youthful freshness of emotion as well. He wrote, not as a youth nor as an elder, but as a man. The seasons were blended in his verse "Like two mixed wines in one cup." Poems like *The Daffodils*, *Three Years she grew*, Lucy poems, *Solitary Reaper*, *To the Highland Girl* appeal as much to the young as to the old, though the old might find meanings in them not suspected by callow youths. Wordsworth unites the wisdom of experience with the emotional element. His poems, even those which predominantly address the intellect, have, I feel, no chill of age about them. As a critic remarks, "In Wordsworth wisdom was an essential part of his *Genius*, and therefore carried with it that fervour which belongs to genius in its most vital period." In India, Wordsworth is enjoyed by the young and old

alike. Rather by the young more than by the old, for the old have taken the cue from the West and consider it out of fashion to enjoy Wordsworth. Wordsworth himself, I believe, would have liked his poetry to be read by the young whose minds are yet fresh and unsophisticated and to whom a dew-drop on a grass means that the grass is crying. In the very ethos of the Indian mind there is a vein of mysticism that makes Wordsworth come to us with a rich appeal and makes of him our spiritual comrade from the first. He has given us for a daily possession those suggestion of other-worldliness of whose gentle ministry with our baser nature the hurry and bustle of the Western civilisation scarcely ever allow us to be conscious. He revives for us our old ideal of *being* as distinct from *doing*. He teaches us the art of impassioned contemplation, the secret of which our revered ancestors knew so well, but which we have been, in our obsession with the mere machinery of life, so quickly losing.

CHAPTER V

POEMS

The Reverie of Poor Susan

'The Reverie of Poor Susan' is one of Wordsworth's early poems. It was probably written during the short visit which Wordsworth and Dorothy paid to their brother Richard in London, in 1797. "This arose," he said, "out of my observations of the affecting music of these birds"—the caged thrushes—"hanging in this way in the London streets during the freshness and stillness of the Spring morning."

Here we have an example of the transforming power of a sudden flash of memory and the vision which it brings with it. In this particular instance, memory has been vividly and painfully reawakened by the song of a bird. A servant girl walking in the gloomy streets of London hears a caged thrush singing in front of a shop. It startles her to hear the song of the bird in that place, and she stops to listen. And as she stops, the song of the little creature brings back to her mind the sunny country village where she played as a child. She no longer sees the ugly streets; she no longer hears the roar of London; now she sees flowers and trees and flowing water, and smells the sweet smell of hay and hawthorn blossoms. But only for a moment. Her return is not a cottage in the dale, but to the London street:

"The stream will not flow and the hill will not rise
And the colours have all passed away from her eyes."

The germ of this poem is in the fact that even in the city-streets Wordsworth was haunted by the spirit of nature. As Wordsworth writes in the Seventh Book of the *Prelude* :

“This did I feel, in London’s vast domain
The spirit of Nature was upon me there ;
The soul of Beauty and enduring Life
Vouchsafed her inspiration...”

Or as in ‘Farmer of Tilsbury Vale’—

‘And Nature, while through the great city he lies,
Full ten times a day takes his heart by surprise.’

‘The Reverie’ describes one of these sudden shocks of vision and memory. F. W. H. Myers remarks : ‘The picture is one of those which come home to many a country heart with one of those sudden revulsions into the Natural which philosophers assert to be the essence of human joy.’

The rhythm of this poem is anapaestic. Wordsworth never succeeded in composing good anapaestic verse. Theodore Watts-Dunton remarks in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* : “Before the poet begins to write he should ask himself whether his natural impulse is towards the weighty iambic movement whose primary function is to state, or towards those lighter movements which we still call for want of more convenient words anapaestic and dactylic, whose primary function is to suggest. Whenever Wordsworth and Keats pass from the former to the latter they pass atonce into doggerel. Nor is it difficult to see why English anapaestic and dactylic verse must suggest and not state, as even so comparatively

successful a *tour de force* as Shelley's 'Sensitive Plant' shows. Conciseness is a primary virtue of all statements. The moment the English poet tries to 'pack' his anapaestic or dactylic line, as he can pack his iambic line, his versification becomes rugged, harsh, pebbly—becomes so of necessity. Nor is this all: anapaestic and dactylic verse must in English be alliterative, or the same pebbly effect begins to be felt. The anapaestic line is so full of syllables that in a language where the consonants dominate the vowels (as in English), these syllables grate against each other, unless their corners are artfully levelled by one of the only two smoothing processes at the command of the English versifier—obtrusive alliteration, or an obtrusive use of liquids. Now these demands of form may be turned by the perfect artist to good account if his appeal to the listener's soul is primarily that of suggestion by sound or symbol, but if his appeal is that of direct and logical statement, the diffuseness inseparable from good anapaestic and dactylic verse is a source of weakness such as the true artist should find intolerable."

Expostulation and Reply

The Poet represents his friend as remonstrating with him for dreaming his time away, sitting on an old gray stone by Esthwaite Lake. He is urged to take to his books instead, and imbibe "the spirit breathed from dead men to their kind." To this the Poet makes reply, in which he brings out his belief in Nature as a source of inspiration and knowledge. The 'might sum of things' has a voice which reaches the human mind and heart. Man must not always be 'seeking' truth. There is a time for quiet meditation, and for communion with the

spirit of the Universe. Let us listen to the voice "of things for ever speaking" and learn the lesson intended for the receptive soul.

"Nor less I deem that there are powers
Which of themselves our minds impress ;
That we can feed this mind of ours
In a wise passiveness."

Professor Beatty would argue that there is here nothing 'mystical'; that it contains no more than the prose statement of Locke: "The mind is wholly passive in the reception of all its simple ideas." But, as Read points out, the 'powers which of themselves' impress our minds are not to be neglected in Wordsworth's poem.

The Tables Turned

The same friend is urged in turn to quit his books and to come forth "into the light of things" and learn of Nature. Books are a 'dull and endless strife.' Nature, on the other hand, is full of truth and wisdom. It is not only that the music of the linnet is sweet; 'there's more of wisdom in it.' The throstle too is 'no mean preacher.' Nature has 'a world of ready wealth' to bless our minds and hearts:

"Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness."

From her we may learn more of man, of moral evil and of good than from the wisdom of the sages. Both science and art, as teachers, are inferior to her. Their leaves are barren; their methods are fruitless, so far as introducing us to the real meaning of things is concerned. Science 'mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things.' Analysis kills the soul of things. "We murder to dissect." We

need the warm, sympathetic, watchful, receptive heart to get at Nature's secret meanings.

These two poems embody many articles of Wordsworth's faith. His famous thesis that Nature is the best and truest of all teachers is here succinctly and clearly set forth. Some critics have accused Wordsworth of talking extravagance if not downright nonsense in them. Thus Lord Morley declares that "no impulse from a vernal wood can teach us anything at all of moral evil and of good." We may admit that the round dismissal of books is playful banter of the old schoolmaster who would have us do nothing but read books. Nor is Wordsworth really hostile to scientific investigation. He revered so profoundly the ideal of knowledge that he defined poetry itself as 'the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science'—by which he meant, not that poetry is instruction expressed with emotion or that poetry is argument conveyed with eloquence and *elan*, but that the Imagination, which is the creative faculty of poetry, is also 'Reason in her most exalted mood'; not the 'mistress of error,' the 'mad inmate of the mind,' but an instrument of discovery and a warrant of certitude. What Wordsworth really meant was not that Nature teaches better than books the things which books teach but that through communion with her we shall gain more moral energy and more spiritual insight than we can ever get from all the philosophies of the schools, and that through such energy and insight we shall obtain a clearer vision of good and 'evil than mere knowledge will ever afford. Now this corresponded with Wordsworth's experience; and it is a fundamental tenet in his thought

and faith. In the *Prelude*, for instance, he represents himself as having been guided from childhood, through youth, up to manhood, by the moral spirit of Nature, receiving direction and wisdom from it. He declares that the "Wisdom and spirit of the Universe" intertwines "the passions that build up our human soul" by the power of high and enduring things. It purifies "the elements of feeling and thought" and sanctifies pain and fear to our highest good.

But spiritual communion with Nature is possible only on condition that we approach her in the right mood—the mood, not of analysis and speculation, but of receptivity and deep religious contemplation. We must go to her in 'a wise passiveness,' with "a heart that watches and receives," in the right humble temper, laying aside curious searchings and strenuous purposes. The thought recurs in the verses *To my sister* :—

'One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason :
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season.'

Raleigh says, "A moral philosopher, indeed, may attain to unimpeachable conclusions and yet have very imperfect ideas of morality because his conceptions of good and evil are meagre and languid—his black is brown and his white is merely grey. No one who is not capable of great happiness can be a highly moral being. And that happiness that comes to a soul from finely attuned sympathies with all the joyful impulses of Nature seemed to Wordsworth to be, in the deepest and most serious sense, a 'factor of morality.'" If only the eye and the ear be open

and the mind free from preoccupation and the innumerable disquieting movements of mental self-assertion, Nature will do the rest, and we have but to be passive.

But the passiveness must be eager and alert, the 'wise passiveness' of a heart that watches as well as receives. In Wordsworth's developed thought this eager 'watching' is the condition in which inner creative power is put forth. 'They,' he says of such watchers in *Prelude* XIII :

" They from their natives selves can send abroad
Like transformations, for themselves create
A like existence, and whene'er it is
Created for them, catch it by an instinct ;
Them the enduring and the transient both
Serve to exalt ; they build up greatest things
From least suggestions, ever on the watch,
Willing to work, and to be wrought upon,
They need not extraordinary calls
To rouse them, in a world of life they live,
By sensible impression not enthrall'd,
But quicken'd, rous'd, and made thereby more apt
To hold communion with the invisible world."

In a prefatory note Wordsworth informs us that " Expostulation and Reply " was " a favourite among the Quakers," doubtless because of the mysticism involved.

The style of these poems is simple without effort, though the expression is too emphatic and over-fanciful. Herford remarks, " They are classical in a kind to which nothing in our literature, and little in any other, is analogous."

Tintern Abbey

Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey was composed in July, 1798, on coach and boat as Wordsworth and Dorothy returned from the Wye (on 13th July, 1798). Concerning the circumstances under which the poem was written, Wordsworth says: "No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just as I was entering Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of four or five days, with my sister. Not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol. It was published almost immediately after in the little volume of which so much has been said in these Notes, the 'Lyrical Ballads,' as first published at Bristol by Cottle."

Myers says: "The 'Lines written above Tintern Abbey' have become, as it were, the *locus classicus*, or consecrated formulary of the Wordsworthian faith. They say in brief what it is the work of the poet's biographer to say in detail." Herford remarks: "It is not only a great poem, of a flawless and noble beauty throughout such as Wordsworth rarely achieves; it is also one of his most personal pieces, wrought from the inmost stuff of his mind and heart."

Five years before, in 1793, after crossing Sarum Plain, to visit his old College friend Robert Jones, Wordsworth had made a journey to the Wye. That was the year following his return from France. In France Wordsworth had had overwhelming experiences, and his mind was in a state of emotional and intellectual agitation, when he

visited Tintern Abbey. Herbert Read says : " I conceive that it was then that Wordsworth first realised that intimate communion with natural beauty which was to be the mainspring of his poetry and the source of his original philosophy. I think we can best describe his state as one of intense sensational awareness. He was exhausted by his experience in France ; or rather he was excited to a pitch of emotional sensitiveness that made every sight and sound acute beyond belief. It was a state of sensational ecstasy and on the basis of this purely physical experience, he built up his philosophy of nature and his theory of the development of the individual mind. Both were, in a sense, rationalistic ; that is to say, by the law of association everything followed from the primary physical sensations—everything, perhaps, except the final intuition of that dark inscrutable workmanship which reconciles discordant elements."

The memory of the 'beauteous forms' of the Wye had evidently lingered with him, and he now tells us something of their ministry to his soul during this long interim. He has owed to them, in lonely rooms and in the midst of the wearying din of town and city, pleasant and deep-seated sensations, bringing peace and tranquillity to his soul, also quiet, subtle, unremembered pleasures which prompt many of the kindly acts that make up the best portion of a good man's life ; and, what is more, that serene and blessed mood in which the Poet was almost completely released from the tyranny of body and sense, and became a living soul, catching a vision of the inner nature of things. Thus Nature, not only immediately, through the eye of sense, but mediately, through the power

of memory, was able, by a remembered harmony, to lay him asleep in body and become a living soul.

But if what has been said concerning Nature's power to inspire such a mystic vision be but a vain belief, still there is no doubt in the Poet's mind concerning her power to heal the lacerated spirit.

The poem grows in interest, showing, as it does, his state of mind as he stands again in the actual presence of these former scenes, and Past, Present, and Future seem to engage his consciousness. In the midst of these attractive surroundings he has not only a sense of present pleasure but a pleasing thought that the present moment has life and food for future years. At least, so he dares to hope, although, undoubtedly, he has changed in some respects since his former visit. The stage in which the love of nature was simply a healthy boy's delight in freedom and the open air had already gone by. Then followed that intermediate period in which the sensuous beauty of nature was loved with an unreflecting passion altogether 'untouched by intellectual interests or associations. Nature then was to him all in all; her forms were an appetite, a love.

" That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye."

That time is past; a change has been wrought. Yet he does not mourn the change, for other gifts have followed, in which he finds abundant recompense. Now his love of nature becomes profoundly religious in character. He is no longer steeped in mere personal or subjective feeling. As he beholds here, he often hears

‘ The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.’

Nature now leads him to Man with his spiritual burden. She has also powerfully affected his intellectual and emotional life. He has felt a presence that disturbs him with the joy of elevated thoughts. He has had a sense of an all-pervading spirit in Nature, in such close relations to his soul as to awaken a sublimer consciousness of its immanence and activity, both in Nature and in Man than he had ever before experienced. In it both things and men live and move and have their being. It is because of this sublime and profound insight that he still loves nature so deeply, finds in her an anchor of his purest thoughts, a nurse, a guide, a guardian of his heart and the very soul of his moral being.

Wordsworth thus distinguishes three stages in the growth of the mind—the ‘glad animal movements’ of childhood, the ‘passions’ and ‘appetites’ of youth, and lastly the ‘serene and blessed mood.’ This scheme corresponds to Hartley’s theory in which the development of the mind is divided into three stages, corresponding to the processes of association—the age of sensation, or Childhood ; the age of simple ideas, or Youth ; and finally the age of complex ideas, or Maturity.

Wordsworth continues to speak of Nature and of her relations to Men. Turning in thought to her sister, to pay her a kindly tribute, he again gives expression to his regard for Nature. ‘She never did betray the heart that loved her. She so ministers to the mind through her beauty, through the knowledge she imparts, and the

thoughts she inspires, through her solaces and joys, that all the evil men can do, and all the dullness and dreary intercourse of daily life can neither prevail against us, nor disturb our cheerful faith that all which we behold is full of blessings. A critic remarks. "Here is a creed full of moral and spiritual elevation, and Wordsworth seems to believe it with his whole mind and heart. He smites the hard rock in the wilderness of human life, and from it flows a veritable stream of living water, full of healing for human souls. Nowhere in literature can be found a more refined spiritualism, and a more indomitable optimism, than is here expressed."

Wordsworth closes the poem with a confession that he had long worshipped at Nature's shrine, and that he came to the banks of the Wye "unwearied in that service," nay, even with a warmer affection for his divine Mistress—a "far deeper zeal of holier love." So that the 'beauteous forms' which greet his eye and minister to his spirit, as he stands near these waters that roll 'from their mountain-springs with a soft inland murmur,' are dearer to him than heretofore.

In the closing lines Wordsworth invokes for Dorothy the blessings of memory. But those mystic heights are not, or not yet, for her. The 'wild ecstasies' which he has outgrown still possess her. Presently they will mature into a sober pleasure of calm reminiscence when her mind shall be as a dwelling place for all lovely forms.

Myers remarks: "The essential spirit of the 'Lines Near Tintern Abbey' was for practical purposes as new to mankind as the essential spirit of the 'Sermon on the Mount.' Not the isolated expression of moral ideas, but

their fusion into a whole in one memorable personality, is that which connects them for ever with a single name. Therefore it is that Wordsworth is venerated, because to so many men—indifferent, it may be, to literary or poetical effects, as such—he has shown by the subtle intensity of his own emotion how the contemplation of Nature can be made a revealing agency, like Love or Prayer,—an opening, if indeed there be any opening, into the transcendent world."

The core of Wordsworth's doctrine is in these lines :

"And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting Suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods."

This immanence of a spirit in Nature and Man, and the conception of it as the active, animating power in both gives rise to a suspicion of Pantheism. A power so deeply interfused with Nature and Man, which has as its dwelling not only the light of setting Suns, the vast ocean, the Universal air, and infinite sky, but also the self-conscious and self-determining mind of Man ; which is the impelling power of all thinking things, and of the objects of all thoughts ; that rolls through all things—such a Power, it is said, is " the All " of the Pantheist. Indeed, his own

kinsman-biographer says : "If also, as is not improbable, the reflective reader should be of the opinion that a 'worshipper of nature' is in danger of divinizing the Creation and of dishonouring the Creator, and that, therefore, some portions of this poem might be perverted to serve the purpose of a popular and pantheistic philosophy, he will remember that the author of the 'Lines on Tintern Abbey' composed also the 'Evening Voluntaries,' and that he who professes himself an ardent votary of nature, has explained the sense in which he wishes these words to be understood, by saying, that

' By grace divine,

Not otherwise, O nature, we are thine.' "

But, as Sneath points out, this apology, or explanation, is unnecessary, because there is no Pantheism here.

Thorough-going Pantheism does not speak of a Universal Spirit, or of a God, or of an Absolute, as *dwelling in* nature, but *identifies* Nature with the Absolute.

Pantheism does not speak of the Universal Spirit as *dwelling in* the mind of Man. It *identifies* the human mind with the Universal Being. According to Pantheism, things and minds have no essential being, no separate individuality, no being-for-self. They exist only as modes of the one Ultimate Being.

Pantheism does not contemplate the possibility of personality in either God or Man. All being is governed by an inner law of necessity and hence there can be no moral life in God or Man. With Pantheism, that is, there is no real self-hood.

Wordsworth's conception is very far removed from Pantheism. He brings out the existence of three distinct

natures—a Universal Presence, a world of corporeal things, and a world of finite spirits. He does not identify the Universal Spirit with “the light of setting Suns,” nor with “the round ocean,” nor with “the living air,” nor with “the blue sky,” nor with “the mind of man.” He merely affirms that these are its “dwelling,” and that Spirit is their impelling power. Only the *immanence* of the Absolute in the finite is declared—a faith not incongruous with Theism. As Sneath says : “He is giving utterance to a refined Theistic view of God, things and finite minds, rather than to either a Pantheistic or an Idealistic view. And if his intuition of the relations of this spirit to things and minds does not completely satisfy, it is hardly, in the final analysis, less satisfactory than the conclusions of Philosophy. At least it does not involve the difficulties inherent in Pantheism—the cancellation of the reality of the finite, and of personality in both God and Man. And yet it preserves to us the satisfying truth of the Divine *immanence* in the world, which constitutes the main strength of Pantheism. And how immeasurably superior is the Poet’s teaching to that crude, unphilosophic, unpoetic, Deistic doctrine of God’s relation to the world which obtained in the age preceding, which despiritualized Nature and robbed the world of God’s presence, conceiving of him as afar off—a Creator who, having made his world, withdrew from it, and from his transcendental throne looks down upon a huge machine, running like a wound-up clock; and, as Carlyle remarks, ‘sees it go!’” Herbert Read also does not regard Wordsworth’s philosophy as strictly pantheistic, for “nature is not worshipped as an entity ; the mighty world of eye and ear is without ; manifesting

the same sublime sense, but coexistent, not coincident, with the mind of man ; and though the same impulse animates all objects of all thoughts, the mind rises above the objects it contemplates, to the creation of a moral being, a soul."

The same ideas as are expressed in *Tintern Abbey* poem recur in the discourse of the Wanderer in the 'Excursion' Book IX. There is a soul or active principle, he says, in everything ; in stars, clouds, trees, rocks—in short, in Nature ; and, he adds, in " the human mind ; " which, he observes, is " its most apparent home " since there it appears without disguise, a Soul. It is however the same soul in Nature and in Man ; for, though it is distinct in every form of being, yet the spirit is one, continuous, and undivided in all :

" From link to link

It circulates, the soul of all the worlds."

Compare,

" Thou Being that art in the clouds and air,
That art in the green leaves and in the groves."

" Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe :

Thou Soul, that art the Eternity of thought
And giv'st to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion —"

The verse of 'Tintern Abbey' is of magical power but it rarely differs in phrase from impassioned prose and it is wholly untouched by ornament. The quality of thought and passion with which it is charged would admit only the barest words. Yet Wordsworth gives us some of the most beautiful and musical lines that were ever written, like :

"The still, sad music of humanity,"

or,

"Whose dwelling is the light of setting Suns."

Herbert Read has analysed the music of the former. "There are whispering sibilants repeated in Still, Sad, —sic: there is the carry-over with subtle variation of the 'i' sound; vowels and consonants are musically combined. But the main force of the line comes from the conjunction of a purely emotive phrase like, 'still sad music' with a word of vague but immense associations like 'humanity'...Its music echoes in exact equivalence the emotional perception the words express." The second line is a musical combination of 'l' and 'r' sounds.

Elton remarks that Wordsworth recovered the art of shaping abstract ideas, or abstractly stated emotions, into true consistency with poetic law, and in 'Tintern Abbey' is to be found that art 'beyond all cavil.'

'Tintern Abbey' is the greatest of Wordsworth's brief meditations in blank verse, the most artfully varied and fluid in its transitions, with the utmost clearness in its total effect.

Lines written in early Spring

It was written in the Spring of 1798 while Wordsworth "was sitting by the side of the brook that runs...through the grounds of Alfoxden." This Alfoxden dell was one of his chosen resorts. Coleridge describes it in his poem, "This Lime Tree Bower my Prison," written while Charles Lamb was on a visit to Nether Stowey.

The poet, brooding in solitude, is touched by the thought of the sufferings of humanity, and the note of sadness steals in as he contrasts "Nature's holy plan" with "What man has made of man."

The second stanza suggests the poet's pantheistic creed :

"To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran."

The works of nature are in a sense alive, and they share in a Universal Soul which is common to them and humanity. As John Veitch says: "In Wordsworth there is the tendency to seek to grasp the world as a whole, to a point above details, to seek relation, connectedness, unity, in the phenomena of sense, to centre all phenomena, all appearances, in one—a Unity of Being. This with Wordsworth is not a mere unity, there is somehow the consciousness of a spirit—call it infinite or absolute—which permeates all the forms of existence, all the world of created things, working therein as a power, and therein manifesting its Nature." Compare Shelley's Pantheism in the 'Adonais,' which was greatly influenced by the Neo-Platonic doctrine of Plotinus concerning the 'Universal Soul' :

"He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely ; he doth hear
His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull dense world compelling there
All new successions to the forms they wear ;
Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks at flight
To its own likeness, as each mass may bear ;
And bursting in its beauty and its might
From trees and beasts and man into the heavens'
light."

In the third stanza Wordsworth's observation of minute differences is shown in :

"Through primrose *tufis*, in that sweet bower,
The periwinkle trailed its *wreaths*,"

and in the next two lines :

"And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes,"

Wordsworth extends pleasure and pain and the moral life, which man is apt to claim for himself alone, to Nature. Wordsworth conceives of a separate life of Nature and Man.

Morley calls this "a charming poetic fancy and no more." The fact, however, is that what Wordsworth here calls his faith is "the corner-stone of his poetry and no less." In Books II and III of the 'Prelude,' Wordsworth tells us that he mounted to "community with highest truth" by this way :

"To every natural form, rock, fruits, or flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
I gave a moral life : I saw them feel,
Or linked them to some feeling : the great mass
Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
That I beheld respired with inward meaning.

...

Some called it madness—so indeed it was,
If childlike fruitfulness in passing joy,
It steady moods of thoughtfulness matured
To inspiration, sort with such a name ;
If prophecy be madness ; if things viewed
By poets in old time, and higher up
By the first men, earth's first inhabitants,
May in these tutored days no more be seen
With undisordered sight."

It is not the poet who makes Nature this or that by giving himself to her ; it is she who builds up part of his being

by communicating herself to him. It is not that the birds sing of certain things of which he is thinking, but that the birds sing their own emotions :

“ The birds around me hopped and played

Their thoughts I cannot measure.”

He does not define their thoughts ; he is only certain that they do think, and have pleasure and pain of their own :

“ But the least motion that they made

It seemed a thrill of pleasure.”

Amid such fair works of nature, it grieves Wordsworth to think of ‘ man’s inhumanity to man.’ Morley remarks : “ As if Nature itself, excluding the conscious doings of that portion of Nature which is the human race, and excluding also nature’s own share in the making of Man, did not abound in racking cruelties and horrors of her own.” What Wordsworth really means is that man has made of man a thing less natural than the rest of nature, that man has come to lead a kind of artificial existence wherein he must ignore the simpler and healthier life and pleasure which are sufficient to render happy objects which are more natural.

The poem is in Iambic tetrameter.

“ Lucy ” poems

This group of exquisite lyrics, written early in 1799, belongs to the Goslar period. The genesis of these poems remains a mystery. Wordsworth has told us nothing about these, except that they were composed in Germany, and one of them—“ Three years she grew ”—in the Harz forest. Is Wordsworth intentionally reticent or are these poems mere fiction ? Do these poems contain reminiscences of some personal experience or are they spun

purely out of the poet's fancy? Nobody can say. "Wordsworth," says De Quincey, "always preserved a mysterious silence on the subject of that 'Lucy' repeatedly alluded to or apostrophized in his poems." Herford remarks: "Nothing in these poems in any way recalls what we know of Wordsworth's actual experience of love. This idyll of a lonely mountain glen throws no light upon the sudden passion which had inflamed him in the midst of the revolutionary turbulence of Orleans. Annette, whatever else she was, was certainly no child of Nature, and the Lucy, here rather delicately hinted than drawn, is enshrined, like the more vivid and personal image of Dorothy, in his ideal of Nature and the moulding discipline she brings."

In *Strange fits of passion have I known*, the lover is riding in the evening to visit his love, and as he approaches her cottage the moon that lights him to it sinks in appearance nearer and nearer to the cottage roof:

'My horse moved on; hoof after hoof
He raised, and never stopped.
When down beneath the cottage roof,
At once, the bright moon dropped.
What fond and wayward thoughts will slide
Into a Lover's head!
"O mercy!" to myself I cried,
"If Lucy should be dead!"'

Wordsworth here as elsewhere too, is interpreting events by the light of the emotions—emotions in which Wordsworth found the secret and spring of man's life. It does not matter whether the interpretation is valid or not. In a letter written to Coleridge's periodical, the 'Friend,' Wordsworth describes how the reason works by thought

through feeling, and this poem may be taken as an illustration of such working.

In *Education of Nature*, the poet tells us how his beloved had been cared for by nature since her tenderest years, how nature had vowed to make her 'a Lady of my own,' imparting to her 'the silence and the calm of mute insensate things,' either bidding the storm 'mould the maiden's form by silent sympathy,' or causing 'beauty born of murmuring sound to pass into her face.' Nowhere has Wordsworth more simply and delicately described the twofold power of Nature, to quicken and to calm, extolled in the opening of the Twelfth Book of 'The Prelude':

"Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse : and with me
The Girl, in rock and plain,
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower
Shall feel an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain."

A critic points out that among the pictures which Wordsworth has left us of the influence of nature on human character, 'Peter Bell' may be taken as marking one end and 'Poems on Lucy' the other end of the scale. 'Peter Bell' lives untouched by nature while Lucy's whole being is moulded by nature's self. Between these two extremes are poems like 'Ruth' in which the point impressed upon us is that Nature's influence is only salutary so long she is herself in keeping with man. Hutton remarks : "If anyone doubts the real affinity between the expression written on the face of nature and those human expressions which so early interpret themselves

even to infants that to account for them, except as a natural language, seems impossible, the exquisite poem on "Lucy" (*Three years she grew*, etc.) ought to convert him. The contrast it illustrates between Wordsworth's faith in real emanations from all living or unliving "make insensate" things, and the humanised "spirits" of life in the Greek mythological poetry, is very striking. Influences came from all these objects but *personified* influences never."

The lines :

"And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face,"

are rather mysterious. If we explain them to mean that the secret pleasure of listening to the melodious murmur of streams shall react upon her face and tend to make it beautiful, they become un-Wordsworthian, for the Wordsworthian conception is that of 'noble sounds as moulding the human countenance to noble types.' Wordsworth regards Beauty and music as two phases of one and the same thing capable of acting and reacting upon each other. For instance he speaks of—

"A soft *eye-music* of slow weaving boughs
Powerful almost as vocal harmony."

Sir Thomas Browne, in his 'Religio Medici' writes : "And sure there is *music even in the beauty*, and the silent note which Cupid strikes, is far sweeter than the sound of an instrument. For there is a music wherever there is a harmony, order or proportion."

W. A. Heard remarks that "the lines are not only true poetry, but have a Platonic felicity of language as the expression of a philosophy." The poem, a critic makes bold to say, can never be surpassed in its union of the

beautiful and the spiritual. Legouis sees in it the fine excess of poetry : " Here Wordsworth joins company with the most aerial of poets. He drops to the earth, for once, all that matter-of-factness of which Coleridge complained. He sets common observation at defiance and simply ignores the objections of common sense, with which he is elsewhere only too prone to argue. Though most thoroughly himself when shaping Lucy's natural education, he gives wings, not feet, to his most cherished belief."

In *She dwelt among the untrodden ways*, Wordsworth illustrates the theme that fame cannot make love more sweet or death more bitter. He first describes the utter seclusion of the maiden's abode, then illustrates her modest sweetness and her loveliness with two similes, and finally, in lines which combine depth of emotion with the severest self-restraint in expression, the effect of Lucy's early death on himself :

" But she is in her grave, and oh,
The difference to me !"

In *The Education of Nature*, Wordsworth had movingly dwelt on the thought of the healing and uplifting power of memory :

" She died, and left to me
This heath, this calm and quiet scene ;
The memory of what has been,
And never more will be,"

but in this poem Wordsworth forgoes even that thought and gives us a simple exclamation of 'bare, sheer, penetrating power.'

In *I travelled among unknown men*, Wordsworth says that it was not till he left England that he knew the strength

of his love of country and the nature of the feeling as rooted in the domestic affections. The close of the poem is very touching :

" Thy mornings showed, thy nights concealed
Thy bowers where Lucy played ;
And thine too is the last green field
That Lucy's eyes surveyed."

The poet personifies both Morning and Night making them as it were the property of England.

In the eight-line dirge, *A slumber did my spirit seal*, the poet, in his desolation, remembers how she whom he mourns had seemed to him while yet alive, to be a thing 'not born for death.' It is, as Raleigh remarks : " Almost superhuman in its power of control, where each of the short sentences is half a tragedy." The style is that of an inspired simplicity. Its bareness, to quote Herford, is stoical, impersonal, sublime ; its austere reticence more eloquent of passion than outspoken grief : " Wordsworth's strength makes no demonstration ; his reserve is so complete as to be almost inexpressible. There is an indissoluble self-possession as of the mountains..." In the last two lines, the tragic rises to the terrible :

" Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees."

Stephen Gwynn says : " The reader should notice how the sublimest expression of grief may consist in stating what is merely the barest amplification of one phrase, ' she is dead.' But a man needs to command a marvellous dignity of accent to state that as Wordsworth has done in barely a score of simple words, which nevertheless seem to envelop the very globe in the gloom of his sorrow."

Professor Dowden, in 'Studies in Literature' considers this poem as an example of the perfect use by the imagination, for the service of the feelings of a suggestion of science : " Again it is the conception of the revolving earth with its unceasing monotony of motion, which asserts a power to exalt and vivify human passion. But now instead of the mystery of life and the calm of the climbing wave of joy, we are in presence of the imperious suspension of death, the obstruction and sterility of the grave. A spirit and a woman has become a clod. She who had been a motion and a breeze is one with the inert brute-matter of the globe, and as the earth whirls everlastingly, she too is whirled by a blind and passionless force." Legouis calls this poem as one of the most desperate sob that ever escaped the heart of a forlorn lover.

It is in reading the 'Lucy' poems, perhaps, that we can best understand Wordsworth's remark to Aubrey de Vere : " Had I been a writer of love-poetry it would have been natural to me to write it with a degree of warmth which could hardly have been approved by my principles."

Lucy Gray

Of this poem, Wordsworth says : " It was founded on a circumstance told me by my sister, of a little girl who, not far from Halifax, in Yorkshire, was bewildered in a snow-storm. Her footsteps were tracked by her parents to the middle of the lock of a canal, and no other vestige of her, backward or forward could be traced. The body, however, was found in the canal. The way in which the incident was treated, and the spiritualizing of the character, might furnish hints for contrasting the imaginative influences which I have endeavoured to throw over common life

with Crabbe's matter-of-fact style of handling subjects of the same kind." It was part of Wordsworth's aim to deal faithfully with reality without allowing fidelity to pass into the hard literalism of Crabbe.

Lucy Gray suffers a pathetic doom but her 'solitude' evoking, as always, the mystic in Wordsworth, touches her with unearthly beauty. 'When I was little,' a lover of Wordsworth once said, 'I could hardly bear to read Lucy Gray, it made me feel so lonely.' Wordsworth announces the main impression he wishes to produce in the opening lines :

"I chanced to see at break of day
The solitary child."

"No mate, no comrade Lucy knew,"
and rounds off the poem with the same intention :

"Yet some maintain that to this day
She is a living child ;
That you may see sweet Lucy Gray
Upon the lonesome wild.
O'er rough and smooth she trips along,
And never looks behind ;
And sings a solitary song
That whistles in the wind."

But, as Bradley points out, there is too much reason to fear that for half his readers his 'solitary child' is generalised into a mere 'little girl.'

Let us compare Kingsley's fine ballad on the girl lost on the sands of Dee with this one of Wordsworth's. Kingsley expresses the piteousness and desolation of the lost child's fate ; Wordsworth desires to paint not the lot of Lucy Gray, but the spiritualised meaning of that

lot as it lived in his imagination. Wordsworth writes his ballad in a contemplative tone and only those can enjoy and appreciate it who approach it in a mood of *sympathetic* emotion. As Hutton remarks: "Wordsworth's purpose evidently was to paint a perfectly lovely solitary flower snapped, for its very purity, in its earliest bud, that it might remain an image of solitary beauty for ever. He *intended* to dissolve away all pain and pity in the loveliness of the picture."

The Prelude

Wordsworth had begun this work in Germany in 1799. It was continued at intervals during his residence in Town-end, Grasmere Vale, until the poem was completed in 1805.

This poem was originally intended to constitute the introduction to a larger work "The Recluse," a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature and Society, having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement. Wordsworth himself, in his Preface to 'The Excursion,' explains the relation of 'The Prelude' to 'The Recluse.' He says: "The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself; and the two works have the same kind of relation to each other, if he may so express himself, as the Ante-Chapel has to the body of a Gothic Church." The Church was left unbuilt.

Wordsworth's friend Lady Richardson says: "The *Prelude* was chiefly composed in a green mountain terrace, on the Easdale side of Helm Crag, known by the name

of Under Lancrigg, a place which he used to say he knew by heart. The ladies sat at their work on the hill-side, while he walked to and fro on the smooth green mountain turf, humming out his verses to himself, and then repeating them to his sympathising and real scribes, to be noted down on the spot, and transcribed at home."

The poem was addressed to Coleridge. After hearing a recitation of the poem, he saw his friend "in the choir of ever-enduring men."

The nature of 'The Prelude' is indicated in its subtitle, which reads—"Or, Growth of a Poet's Mind : An Autobiographical poem." In it Wordsworth traces the development of his own mind as a poet. It is invaluable, therefore, in throwing light on his evolution both as a poet of Nature and as a poet of Man.

In Book I of 'The Prelude,' Wordsworth is speaking of the unique experiences of his boyhood and it is the Presences of Nature that are addressed here. As a man he looks and reflects upon his relation to his physical surroundings and sees in it a moulding force. He turns to his infancy and childhood, and beholds what Nature has done for him in those early surroundings :

"Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear :
Much favoured in my birthplace."

There flowed the Derwent, "the fairest of all rivers,"
which loved

"To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
And, from his alder shades and rocky falls
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
That flowed along my dreams."

Again :

For this, didst thou
O Derwent ! winding among grassy holms
Where I was looking on, a babe in arms,
Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me
Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind
A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves."

Wordsworth then records the powerful influence of his physical surrounding upon his mind during years spent in Esthwaite Vale. He recites a number of experiences which evidence it. There is an account of how, when snaring woodcock on the mountain slopes, he yielded to the temptation to take a bird trapped by another, and then, influenced undoubtedly by his boyish conscience, heard, amid the solitary hills, "low breathings" following him,

"And sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod."

Again, when hunting the raven's eggs on a mountain crag, he had another unique experience, which leads him to conceive of Nature as invested with a kind of spirit life. There is a vague consciousness of a spiritual being in things, that sustains a moral relation to man. The wind utters a strange speech in his ears ; the sky wears an unearthly aspect, and the clouds have a peculiar motion.

The poet records still another incident in the life of this period which reveals how susceptible his sensibility, imagination, and conscience were to Nature's influence, and the tendency on the part of his mind to invest things

with life. Once, on a moonlight night on Esthwaite Lake, while rowing a stolen boat, he saw the huge black peak of Wetherham raise its head from behind a craggy steep which, till then, had appeared to constitute the horizon's bound. This great peak seemed to be "with voluntary power instinct." The grim form appeared to grow in stature as he rowed along, and to stride after him

'With purpose of its own,

And measured motion like a living thing.'

Trembling with fear, he stole back to the place where he had secured the boat, and walked homeward in sober mood. This, however, was not the end of the matter, for he adds :

" After I had seen

That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being ; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields ;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams."

But Nature does not always appear to him as an avenging spirit, inspiring him with fear. Sometimes she brings joy to his heart. The poet records the experience of a skating party on a beautiful starlit night. He wheels about, "proud and exulting like an untired horse " to enter upon the sport. For him the precipices ring aloud, and the bare trees and mountain crags 'tinkle like iron.' He

glides with such swiftness over the ice that, when he is brought to a sudden halt, the solitary cliffs seem to wheel by him "as if the earth had rolled with visible motion her diurnal round." But there is a softer side to the boy's nature. He retires every now and then into a silent bay ; he moves away from the noisy throng

"To cut across the reflex of a star

That fled, and, flying still before me, gleamed

Upon the glassy plain."

Not unnoticed amid the din and sounds from precipices and crags was "the alien sound of melancholy" sent into the tumult from the distant hills. After his sudden stop he stands and watches the solemn train of receding cliffs until all is absolutely tranquil. Thus early the contemplative side of his nature begins to manifest itself.

How does Wordsworth interpret these unique experiences? In these singular states of consciousness he recognises Nature engaged in laying the foundations of his mind. She is ministering to him through 'fearless visitings,' or through 'those that came with soft alarm,' or through 'severer interventions.' This heterogeneous complex of painful conscious states was gradually, under the 'inscrutable workmanship' of Nature, being welded into a harmony which was to play a very important part in the building up of his real selfhood.

The poet teaches the important part that moral experiences play in the development of personality :

"Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe !

Thou soul that art the eternity of thought,

That givest to forms and images a' breath

And everlasting motion, not in vain

By day or starlight thus from my first dawn
 Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
 The passions that build up our human soul ;
 Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
 But with high objects, with enduring things—
 With life and nature—purifying thus
 The elements of feeling and of thought
 And sanctifying, by such discipline
 Both pain and fear, until we recognise
 A grandeur in the beatings of the heart."

For years Nature haunts him in his boyish sports, impressing on all forms "the character of danger or desire." This is her educational method :

"Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
 And on the earth ! Ye visions of the hills !
 And Souls of lonely places ! can I think
 A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
 Such ministry, when ye through many a year
 Haunting me thus among my boyish sports
 On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
 Impressed upon all forms the characters
 Of danger or desire ; and thus did make
 The surface of the universal earth
 With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
 Work like a sea ?"

Gradually Nature appeals to him through the sense of pleasure awakened by her beautiful and sublime aspects. The pleasures awakened begin to appear to be "of subtler origin." Sensations are experienced that seem to own

"An intellectual charm ; that calm delight
 Which, if I err not, surely must belong

To those first-born affinities that fit

Our new existence to existing things."

Occasionally, amid his joys, thus early, the mystical poetic vision dimly dawns and he is conscious of "gleams like the flashing of a shield," and the physical universe speaks "rememberable things."

Herbert Read brings a charge against Wordsworth's whole treatment of the relationship between the 'visible scene' of infancy and the evolving consciousness of the child—which is, that Wordsworth has implied a 'subtler origin' for certain joys at an age when a child is only passively receptive of impressions. Wordsworth himself expresses a fear that he may have been misled by the infirmity of love for days disowned by memory, to plant, ere the breath of spring, snowdrops among winter snows. Says Read: "I would rather suggest that the animal's awareness of the peculiarities of its habitat is not developed unless and until it is deprived of that habitat; that Wordsworth did not become conscious of the intimate link that existed between his character and his surroundings until that link was broken by his departure for Cambridge in 1787. Even then the full realisation of the significance of his early mode of life did not come to him; what traces of that passionate intensity of feeling for nature do we find in 'An Evening Walk' and 'Descriptive Sketches,' his first published poems? Scarcely any. The realisation did not come, in my opinion, until some time after his second visit to France. As that storm subsided, the outraged feelings sought compensation in memories; and then, at first slowly, then riotously, the treasury of his unconscious mind, so richly stored in childhood, was

opened and given forth in the poetry of one wonderful decade."

In Book II Wordsworth speaks of Nature and her overflowing soul and reviews the development of his mind during the Hawkshead days.

Wordsworth's intercourse with nature becomes more active now. She soon becomes so much of a minister to his desires, that he is

"Taught to feel, perhaps too much,

The self-sufficing power of Solitude."

Nature is no longer intervenient and secondary, but is actually sought for her own sake. There is a closer communion with the physical world, resulting in increase of knowledge and in depth of insight and in a sublimer joy in her presence. When night is blackened by an approaching storm, he stands and listens

"To notes that are

The ghostly language of the ancient earth."

Amid fair and tranquil scenes, as well as 'mid gloom and tumult he says : .

"That universal power

And fitness in the latent qualities

And essences of things, by which the mind

Is moved with feelings of delight, to me

Came strengthened with a superadded soul,

A virtue not its own."

The poet walks with nature in the spirit of religious love. His creative faculty has been 'awakened ; a plastic power is with him ; a spiritual hand moulds and fashions ; an 'auxiliar light' coming from his mind bestows new splendour on the 'setting sun. His view of Nature was

gradually transformed ; the analytic conception yielded to the synthetic. He observed affinities in things which had no reality for more passive minds. He recognized a brotherhood among natural objects. Through sympathy he transferred his own pleasures to inorganic things. Nature was instinct with life and happiness ; truth was revealed to his soul and

“ I, at this time
Saw blessings spread around me like a sea.
Thus while the days flew by, and years passed on,
From Nature and her overflowing soul
I had received so much, that all my thoughts
Were steeped in feeling. I was only then
Contented, when with bliss ineffable
I felt the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still ;
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart ;
O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air ; o'er all that glides
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself,
And mighty depth of waters.....”

The mystical Poet is born. Wordsworth has apprehended the spiritual nature of *all* Reality but it must be remembered that the distinct reality of “ the Uncreated,” the reality of things, and the reality of self are preserved. There is no Pantheism here.

The Book ends by stressing the necessity of ‘ Nature ’ for poets :

"Thou hast fed
 My lofty speculations; and in thee
 For this uneasy heart of ours, I find
 A never-failing principle of joy
 And purest passion."

Wordsworth sympathies with Coleridge for not having had his own advantage, for being 'debarred from Nature's living images', and regrets that his influence had not soothed Coleridge's youthful unhappiness.

In Book III 'Residence at Cambridge,' Wordsworth describes the idleness and aimlessness of his first College days roused only by the memory of great Cambridge men like Newton.

When Wordsworth entered Cambridge, he was in high spirits and 'full of hope.' But he soon found that the University was uncongenial to him. Its moral and intellectual atmosphere was dull and uninspiring. The prescribed routine of study was not to his taste and academic distinction "but little sought" by him and 'little won.' Thrown largely upon himself he found refuge in nature and in his own soul and began to discover "what independent solaces" were his "to mitigate the injurious sway of place and circumstance." Often leaving behind him "the crowd, buildings and groves," he would wander alone about the "level fields," missing the mountains to which he had been accustomed, yet still well pleased to peruse "the common countenance of earth and sky"; while evening after evening it was his habit, even in the depth of winter, to linger in the "College groves" and "tributary walks," brooding on many things. In books, too, he found cheering companionship. He

' laughed with Chaucer in the hawthorn shade, beside the pleasant mill of Tropington,' and 'heard him, while birds were warbling, tell his tales of amorous passion.' He called

"Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven
With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace."

"Brother, Englishman, and friend!" And he continues :

"Yea, our blind Poet, who, in his later day,
Stood almost single ; uttering odious truth—
Darkness before, and danger's voice behind,
Soul awful—if the earth has ever lodged
An awful soul—I seemed to see him here
Familiarly, and in his scholar's dress
Bounding before me, yet a stripling youth—
A boy, no better, with his rosy cheeks
Angelical, keen eye, courageous look,
And conscious step of purity and pride."

In this book Wordsworth attributes moral life to natural objects :

"To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
I gave a moral life."

The whole world of so-called corporeal things lies embedded "in a quickening soul."

Wordsworth was not altogether insensible to University life. Often he went with the throng of undergraduates, loving the idleness and joy of good fellowship :

"Companionships,
Friendships, acquaintances, were welcome all ;
We sauntered, play'd, we rioted, we talk'd
Unprofitable talk at morning hours,

Drifted about along the streets and walks,

Read lazily in lazy books, went forth

To gallop through the country in blind zeal—"

He even confesses to drinking too much in honour of Milton 'one afternoon,' and in consequence being late for Chapel. He exclaims:

"Empty thoughts!

I am ashamed of them : and that great Bard,

And thou, O friend ! Who in thy ample mind

Hast placed me high above my best desserts,

Ye will forgive the weakness of that hour,

In some of its unworthy varieties,

Brother to many more."

Herbert Read says : "The Third Book is easily the feeblest part of the whole poem—vague, repetitions, and often resorting to what would be playful heavy humour which is the worst disfigurement of his poetry. Wordsworth is on the defensive—even the Wordsworth of 1805. He feels that it is hard to justify his conduct during those four years, and yet he does not wish to put the blame upon his own disposition."

The Fourth Book entitled 'Summer Vacation,' records the renewed spell exercised on the poet by his native landscape on his first return to it and his first semi-deliberate self-consecration to the task of poetry. No chapter of his 'confessions' is richer in charm, in profound touches, or in amusing naivete.

He revisits his old haunts, joyfully escorted by 'a rough terrier of the hills,' and exchanging greetings half shy, half proud, with old schoolfellows now less well-dressed than himself. He had begun the habit of com-

posing as he walked. But these lonely wanderings were interspersed with gaities, dance and young love-likings. Frivolities and sublime hours were characteristically intermingled and sometimes, as in the old days of his boyish sports, the great moments seemed to start out of the trivial ones. It was thus that the greatest moment of this summer came to him as he returned from a night of 'dancing and gaiety and mirth':

"Ere we retired

The cock had crow'd the sky was bright with day
Two miles I had to walk along the fields
Before I reached my home. Magnificent
The morning was, in memorable pomp,
More glorious than I ever had beheld.
The sea was laughing at a distance ; all
The solid Mountains were as bright as clouds,
Grain-tinctured, drench'd in empyrean light.
Ah! need I say, dear Friend, that to the brim
My heart was full ; I made no vows, but vows
Were made for me ; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit."

This dedication episode is led up to by a warning of a change in apprehension. Something opens which Wordsworth calls 'human-heartedness.' Objects which have hitherto been 'the absolute wealth of his own private being' now cause other thoughts 'of change, congratulation, or regret.' Wordsworth now looks 'with another eye' upon the simple dale-folk he encountered : the quiet Woodman in the woods, the Shepherd on the hills ; even his old Dame, nodding over her Bible on Sunday after-

noons, stirs a delightful interest; and an old soldier, encountered at nightfall by the highway, on a lonely walk, leaves upon his memory an impress, where natural piety mingles with and humanizes the mystic awe which, for Wordsworth consecrates whatever had the air of being one with Nature. "In all this, there was no conscious effort. His mind unfolded new treasures without any struggle of self-discipline, good things came uncalled for, without having been missed or desired."

"A comfort seemed to touch
A heart that had not been disconsolate,
Strength came where weakness was not known to be,
At least not felt; and restoration came
Like an intruder, knocking at the door
Of unacknowledged weariness."

In Book V Wordsworth begins to be influenced by Shakespeare, Milton and other great poets. He breathes a blessing on all those "inspired souls" whose works "lay their sure foundations in the heart of man," from the Hebrew poets and "Homer the great Thunderer" down to the nameless ballad-singers whose "wren-like warblings" are the delight of "cottagers and spinners at the wheel." The only books definitely mentioned are 'Don Quixote,' 'Euclid's Elements' and 'A slender abstract of the Arabian Tales'

Book VI is entitled 'Cambridge and the Alps.' Wordsworth returned to Cambridge in 1788. The poet's soul, he tells us, was with him at that time, and ambitions began to stir. He had sufficient confidence in his own power to trust that he might leave some monument behind him which pure hearts should reverence. His instinctive

humbleness in regard to books and authorship began to melt away, the dread awe of mighty names was softened down and he became more and more conscious of his own poetic power. Even now Nature was not absent from his thoughts. All winter long, whenever he could, he frequented 'Groves and tributary walks,' 'lingering there through hours of silence' till the Porter's Bell rang summons. He was accustomed at this time to measure the truth of what he read by the standard of Nature, her forms and laws. He did not value highly the study of the classics. Geometric science, however, yielded him both elevation and delight.

During this period Wordsworth had also

'Moods melancholy, fits of spleen, that loved

A pensive sky, sad days, and piping winds

The twilight more than dawn, autumn than spring."

Many hours were 'pilfered away' by 'Good-natured lounging.' On the whole, these two winters at Cambridge record comparatively little development.

The second summer was spent chiefly in visiting scenes noted for their beauty. He explored a stream that flowed through Dovedale and pried into the dales of Yorkshire. He was joined by his sister Dorothy and Mary Hutchinson. Together they wandered though the Penrith district, visiting the banks of the Emont and exploring Brougham Castle.

Wordsworth spent his third summer vacation in a visit to the Alps, accompanied by a young friend, Robert Jones. 'This unprecedented course' implied 'a hardy slight' of 'College studies and their set rewards.' But 'Nature then was sovereign in his mind and 'mighty forms,

seizing a youthful fancy had given a charter to irregular hopes.' The French Revolution was a great inducement :

“ But 'twas a time when Europe was rejoiced,
France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again.”

They chanced to land in Calais on the of the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille and ‘ of that great federal day ’ when the King was to swear allegiance to the new Constitution ; and evidences of the wonderful enthusiasm which the Revolution had inspired met them at once on every side, for

‘ There we saw,
In a mean city, and among a few,
How bright a face is worn when joy of one
Is joy for ten of millions.”

Then, striking south, they took their way through hamlets and towns “ gaudy with reliques of that festival ” ; “ songs, garlands, mirth, banners, and happy faces ” made their road gay ; and even in “ sequestered villages,” they

“ Found benevolence and blessedness
Spread like a fragrance everywhere, when spring
Hath left no corner of the land untouched.”

More than once they were witnesses of open-air “ dances of liberty ” and a little later, while sailing up the Rhone, fell in with a number of delegates returning

“ From the great spousals newly solemnised
At their chief city, in the sight of Heaven.”

Wordsworth was greatly impressed by the peaceful homes of the peasants :

“ Oh ! sorrow for the youth who could have seen
Unchastened, Unsubdued, Unawed, Unraised

To patriarchal dignity of mind,
And pure simplicity of wish and will,
Those sanctified abodes of peaceful men,
Pleased (though to hardship born, and compassed
round

With danger, varying as the seasons change),
Pleased with his daily task, or, if not pleased
Contented, from the moment that the dawn
(Ah! surely not without attendant gleams
Of soul-illumination) calls him forth
To industry, by glistenings flung on rocks,
Whose evening shadows lead him to repose."

On his first view of Mont Blanc, from the Col de Balme,
he felt only grief

"To have a soulless image on the eye
Which has usurp'd upon a living thought
That never more could be."

It needed the spectacle, next day, of the wondrous Vale
of 'Chamouny' to 'reconcile him to realities.' Here too
the peacefulness and simplicity of domestic scene arrest
his attention. The pastoral life everywhere has a fascina-
tion for him. He reads

"Lessons of genuine brotherhood, the plain
And universal reason of mankind,
The truths of young and old."

Retracing their steps to the Rhone Valley, they reached
Brieg on the Simplon. On the following day Wordsworth
encountered an experience which in no mind but his
could have generated the sublime poetry it did. At the
summit of the pass the two young men had missed the
track and continued to climb; a peasant sent them back to

the path, for *they had crossed the Alps*. These simple words threw the poet into a kind of trance like a cloud, obscuring sight but releasing powers of inner perception for which he later found words of amazing and prophetic intensity. For this seemed to him to be one of those 'Visitings'

"When the light of sense
Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
The invisible world."

In such visitings doth Greatness make abode :

"There harbours, whether we be young or old
Our destiny, our nature and our home
Is with infinitude, and only there ;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be."

The cloud passed, but the imaginative exaltation persisted as they strode through the narrow ravine that plunged down towards Italy. Every feature of the scene seemed to affirm that infinity which had flashed upon him through the darkness of baffled sense :

"The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decay'd,
The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
And everywhere along the hollow rent
Winds thwarting winds, bewilder'd and forlorn,
The rocks that mutter'd close upon our ears,
Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside
As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
The unfetter'd clouds, and regions of the Heavens,

Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light,
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features
 Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
 Characters of the great Apocalypse
 The types and symbols of Eternity,
 Of first and last, and midst and without end."

This was followed by walks in lighter mood along the vine-festooned paths that wind among the villages overhanging Como, where 'dark-eyed maids' tended gardens by the steep wayside. Wordsworth's account of the relation between the world without and the world within himself is psychologically important. All that he saw, heard, or felt, he declares

" Was but a stream
 That flowed into a kindred stream ; a gale,
 Confederate with the current of the soul,
 To speed my voyage ; every sound or sight,
 In its degree of power, administered
 To grandeur or to tenderness,—to the one
 Directly, but to tender thoughts by means
 Less often instantaneous in effect ;
 Led me to these by paths that, in the main,
 Were more circuitous, but not less sure
 Duly to reach the point marked out by Heaven."

And in spite of the fact that it was a time of political excitement and the awakened hopes of man, "a glorious time, a happy time" when "triumphant looks" were "the common language of all eyes," nature and the wonders of "the everliving Universe" interested him far more :

" A stripling scarcely of the household then
 Of social life, I looked upon these things

As from a distance ; heard, and saw, and felt,
Was touched, but with no intimate concern."

He rather turned from these to the " new delights " which nature spread around his steps " like sunshine o'er green fields."

The Seventh Book is entirely devoted to the months between February and November spent at London. London had laid her spell upon his imagination long before he saw her. He tells with a certain naive wonder how a schoolfellow, returning from a short visit to London, disappointed him because he seemed unchanged bringing no " beams of glory from that new region." Wordsworth watched with keen, unprejudiced, and curious eye, the turmoil of the streets, noted the varieties of occupations, race, and colour, referred to horse-shows, ' a company of dancing dogs,' ' And Negro ladies in white muslin gowns.' He saw all the ' sights,' frequented the theatre, heard the ' brawls of lawyers in their courts'; listened to many sermons, not always to edification; saw Mrs. Siddons; and in the House of Commons was impressed by the oratory of Burke. De Selincourt has discovered that the tribute to Burke the statesman is a later interpolation. As Herford remarks: " It was only the militant Tory of the post-Napoleonic time who, not content with rebuking his former self by adding this magnificent tribute, tried somewhat clumsily to persuade himself that he had, in 1790, already listened with rapturous sympathy :

" Could a youth, and one

In ancient history versed, whose breast had heaved
Under the weight of classic eloquence,
Sit, see, and hear, Unthankful, Uninspired ? "

As little did he hear with the reverential approval described in the revised 'Prelude' the 'awful truths' delivered from the Anglican pulpit. The attitude of the Wordsworth of 1791 to the church is better represented by his sarcastic vignette of the clerical fop, 'fresh from a toilette of two hours,' who leads his voice through 'a minuet course,' breaks at intervals into 'a smile of rapt irradiation exquisite,' and garnishes his discourse with literary scraps."

Yet Wordsworth was not altogether uninfluenced by London. If he walked the overflowing streets, oppressed with the blank confusion of those clashing and entangled purposes, he was sometimes caught up, as he moved with the crowd, by a dream-like vision of human life; and once, in this mood, the spectacle of a blind beggar propped against a wall, with a written paper on his chest, turned his mind back upon itself 'as with the might of waters,' and he saw in that blind face a symbol of the utmost that we know. And the 'blank confusion' of that 'vast Abiding-place of human creatures' actually contributed to make him aware of the unity of man. For there he saw

"One spirit over ignorance and vice
Predominate, in good and evil hearts,
One sense for moral judgments, as one eye
For the sun's light."

Here a further step was taken towards that passionate apprehension of Man which was to be induced by the spectacle of revolution in France. For the time, Nature was still supreme :

"This did I feel, in London's vast domain,
The spirit of Nature was upon me there ;

The soul of Beauty and enduring Life
 Vouchsafed her inspiration, and diffused
 Through meagre lines and colours, and the press
 Of self-destroying transitory things,
 Composure, and ennobling Harmony."

According to Herbert Read, this Book is merely an inspired guide-book to the sights of eighteenth-century London, with the long and irrelevant story of the Maiden of Buttermere thrown in, ending with a description of St. Bartholomew's fair, in whose jumble Wordsworth finds a true comparison for the whole city. Wordsworth then draws the moral: the only escape from this oppression comes from that virtue instilled by the habitual influence of the forms of nature—"the forms perennial of the ancient hills" and "the changeful language of their countenances." But here again, says Read, we are getting away from the actual Wordsworth of 1791, and seeing only the idealisation of the figure made fourteen years later.

Says Sneath: "The uniqueness and real merit of his poetic treatment of the great city does not lie in his description of its everyday appearance and life, nor of the intensity of its life, nor of its solitudes. It lies rather in his mystical poetic intuition, by which he discovers in its brick and mortar, its dirty streets and lanes, its deafening din, its busy life, and its motley crowds "impregnations like the wilds" in which his early feelings had been nursed, as in the feelings suggested by "that huge fermenting mass of human-kind" that served "as a solemn background, or relief, to single forms and objects"—in the vision of the dignity, grandeur, and unity of Man, and in the sublime faith (inspired by the checkered

human throng) in what he may become under divine guidance."

The Eighth Book is Retrospect. Here Wordsworth shows how his love of nature had fostered his love of man by investing man with a dignity drawn from the noble landscapes against which the poet had first noted him ; and how his dignity, first recognised in the shepherds of the Lake District clung to Wordsworth's conception of man even when he saw his petty and ugly side in the London crowds. Addressing Coleridge on this subject, the poet says :

" Thus from a very early age, O Friend !

My thoughts by slow gradations had been drawn

To human-kind, and to good and ill

Of human-life : Nature had led me on ;

And oft amid the ' busy hum ' I seemed

To travel independent of her help,

As if I had forgotten her ; but no,

The world of human-kind outweighed not hers

In my habitual thoughts ; the scale of love,

Though filling daily, still was light, compared

With that in which *her* mighty objects lay."

In Books IX and X Wordsworth describes his visit to France between November 1791, and December 1792. According to his express statement in the original ' Prelude ' he went simply to improve his knowledge of French. His ' readiest course ' to Orleans, which he had chosen for this purpose, lay through Paris, and there he paused a few days, seeking out " each spot of old or recent fame,"—" the latter chiefly." He listened to debates in the National Assembly and the Hall of the Jacobins, and " saw the Revolutionary Power toss like a ship at anchor,

rocked by storms." He wandered through the arcades of the Palais Royal, and 'stared and listened' while 'hawkers and haranguers' and 'hissing Factionists with ardent eyes' made 'hubbub wild' about him. He made a pilgrimage to the ruins of the Bastille

" And from the rubbish gathered up a stone,
And pocketed the relic, in the guise
Of an enthusiast."

Yet, as he confesses, he affected more emotion than he felt and when he went on to Orleans he was still, in a land which "swarmed with passions" and amid all the violent 'concussions' of the hour, unconcerned. Whence this indifference? It was due, he replies, in part to his failure, through want of 'needful knowledge, to realise the portentous significance of what was taking place; in part to the fact that 'at that time the first storm was overblown and the strong hand of outward violence locked up in quiet.' He understood little indeed about the 'nice distinctions then on every tongue, of natural rights and civil'; the 'acts of nations and their passing interests' failed to move him; but the great essential principles of liberty, equality and fraternity were in his very blood :

" For, born in a poor district, and which yet
Retaineth more of ancient homeliness
Than any other nook of English ground,
It was my fortune to have seen,
Through the whole tenor of my schoolday time,
The face of one who, whether boy or man,
Was vested with attention or respect
Through claims of wealth or blood; nor was it least
Of many benefits, in later years

Derived from academic institutes
 And rules, that they held something up to view
 Of a Republic, where all stood thus far
 Upon equal ground ; that we were brothers all
 In honour, as in one community,
 Scholars and gentlemen ; where, furthermore,
 Distinction open lay to all that came,
 And wealth and titles were in less esteem
 Than talents, worth, and prosperous industry
 Add unto this, subservience from the first
 To presences of God's mysterious power
 Made manifest in Nature's sovereignty,
 And fellowship with venerable books,
 To sanction, the proud workings of the soul,
 And mountain liberty. It could not be
 But that one tutored thus should look with awe
 Upon the faculties of man, receive
 Gladly the highest promises, and hail,
 As best, the government of equal rights
 And individual worth. And hence, O Friend
 If at the first great outbreak I rejoiced
 Less than might well befit my youth, the cause
 In part lay here, that unto me the events
 Seemed nothing out of nature's certain course,
 A gift that was come rather late than soon."

He became friendly with 'a band of military officers' stationed at Blois—well-born, true representatives of the chivalry of France, all, with one exception, of strongly anti-revolutionary sentiments. Wordsworth vividly describes the passion which convulsed this knot of men each day when the Paris mail came in, reporting the last step

in the daily increasing violence of the Jacobins ; how one of them, his naturally noble face distorted by hate, and his yellow cheeks fanned into a thousand colours, would shake with fear as he read, while ' his sword was haunted by his touch continually.' It was in the midst of these antagonists of the cause of freedom that his slumbering zeal ' burst forth like a polar summer,' ' every word they uttered was a dart, by counter wind blown back upon themselves.'

And, out of doors, the young man's heart was ' oftentimes uplifted ' by the ' passing spectacles.' Day by day, the roads were crowded with the bravest youth and the promptest spirits of France, posting on to meet the war upon her frontier bounds. He saw pathetic farewells, domestic severings, female fortitude at dearest separation, patriot love and self-devotion and terrestrial hope, encouraged with a martyr's confidence.

At this point, a remarkable personal influence intervened, his friendship with Michael Beaupuy. Wordsworth has given us a graphic portrait of his character— patriot, meek and enthusiastic both, bound in service as by some tie invisible unto the poor, a zealous supporter of the popular cause :

“ Man he loved

As man ; and, to the mean and the obscure,
And all the homely in their homely works,
Transferred a courtesy which had no air
Of condescension.”

With Beaupuy, oft in solitude, did Wordsworth discuss about the end of Civil Government, and its wisest forms and about the great problems of society. Beaupuy not

only enlarged Wordsworth's intellectual range ; he opened his eyes to the abyss of helpless suffering in rural France. One day, in the course of their walk, he and Beaupuy happened to meet " a hunger-bitten girl " listlessly knitting " with pallid hands " and leading by a cord tied to her arm a heifer which, as it followed, picked a scanty meal from the hedges by the wayside. At the sight, Beaupuy exclaimed : " 'Tis against that that we are fighting," and Wordsworth with him believed devoutly that a spirit was abroad, that could not be withstood, that poverty at least like this would in a little time be found no more.

Doubts and ominous forebodings at times disturbed his faith. On his former visit to the Continent he had been troubled by the expulsion of the monks of the Chartreuse. Now as he wandered along the banks of the Loire, he often slipped away in thought from the earnest talk of actualities to the traditional or legendary past. The solemn forest-glades evoked his imaginative sensibility. Hermits walked again in these shades, Ariosto's Angelica or Tasso's Erminia careered on trampling palfreys through the woods, or Spenser's Satyrs danced about a captive Hellenore. When the friends saw in some brookside meadow a Convent, dismantled and roofless, his joy at the destruction of monastic abuse, despite his friend's ' heart-bracing colloquies,' was tempered by involuntary regret for the matin-bell now silent for ever, and the cross on the topmost pinnacle never again to beacon the Worshipper above the woods. But such misgivings were only occasional. Wordsworth was now a " patriot " ; his heart was " all given to the people " and his " love was theirs."

In Book X Wordsworth describes the excitement of his sojourn in Paris in the days that followed the September massacres, and his narrow escape from involvement in the fate of the Girondins, having been 'dragged' away from France "by a chain of harsh necessity."

The question has been raised as to why did Wordsworth pass over the Anne Vallon episode in silence in 'The Prelude.' Herford's reply is this: "It is to be remembered that 'The Prelude' is not an autobiography, but a history of the growth of a poet's mind. An experience so intense as this passion for Annette could leave no sensitive man unchanged. But it stands so utterly aloof from the master currents of his poetry, as well as from everything else known of his life, that it was possible for him, without insincerity, to regard it as a passing episode, a moment of tumult which left no permanent trace upon the depths of his poetic thought and feeling." Herbert Read, on the other hand, says: "This love affair transformed his being; I think that this passion and all its melancholy aftermath was the deepest experience of Wordsworth's life—the emotional complex from which all his subsequent career flows in its intricacy and uncertainty. It was this experience which Wordsworth saw fit to hide—to bury in the most complete secrecy and mask with a long-sustained hypocrisy."

Book XI recounts the moral crisis through which Wordsworth passed on his return, a republican, from a country which was abandoning her republican ideals, to his own country which was attacking them by warring against the Revolution.

Wordsworth recalls the splendid visionary enthusiasm of *that* wonderful era of faith and happiness :

“ O pleasant exercise of hope and joy !
 For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood
 Upon our side, us who were strong in love !
 Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
 But to be young was very Heaven ! O times
 In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
 Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
 The attraction of a country in romance !...”

Before long, however, Wordsworth found himself involved in a fierce struggle of conflicting motives. ‘With open war Britain opposed the liberties of France.’ On the other hand, Frenchmen had ‘changed a war of self-defence for one of conquest.’ For a time, even though France had failed him, Wordsworth clung desperately to the abstract political theories behind the revolutionary movement. Guided by Godwin, he proceeded “to anatomise the frame of social life” and search “the whole body of society” to its very heart. Even his master’s utopianism was converted into the poet’s visionary and impracticable social dream :

“ What delight !
 How glorious I in self-knowledge and self-rule,
 To look through all the frailties of the world,
 And, with a resolute mastery shaking off
 Infirmities of nature, time and place,
 Build social upon personal liberty,
 Which, to the blind restraints of general laws
 Superior, magisterially adopts
 One guide, the light of circumstances, flashed
 Upon an independent intellect.”

This spirit of rationalism was applied by Wordsworth not only to the study of social and political institutions but to the study of Man himself in his essential constitution, as well as to Nature. The result was that Wordsworth sank into the abysmal depths of moral despair—a veritable slough of despond :

“ So I fared,
 Dragging all precepts, judgments, maxims, creeds,
 Like culprits to the bar ; calling the mind,
 Suspiciously, to establish in plain day
 Her titles and her honours ; now believing,
 Now disbelieving ; endlessly perplexed
 With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground
 Of obligation, what the rule and whence
 The sanction ; till, demanding formal proof,
 And seeking it in every thing, I lost
 All feeling of conviction, and, in fine
 Sick, wearied out with contrarieties
 Yielded up moral questions in despair.”

In this great spiritual crisis his salvation—“ thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good ”—was wrought largely through the influence of his sister. She revived for him “ a saving intercourse ” with his “ true self.” She restored him to nature, and ‘ Nature’s self ’ led him back “ through opening day ” to that perfect trust in the divine ordering of the world which was hereafter to be his solace and stay amid all the vicissitudes of life.

In Books XII and XIII, Wordsworth analyses his renewed confidence and joy in poetic production and in the ‘ Conclusion ’ we have a general analysis of the poet’s ripened powers and a picture of his settlement at Alfoxden

in company with his sister Dorothy and in the neighbourhood of Coleridge.

According to Herbert Read, the 'Prelude' is a poem the greatness of which does not consist in its biographical veracity. It is an idealisation of the poet's life, not the reality.

Biographical value of the 'Prelude.'

Herbert Read finds difficulty in accepting the 'Prelude' as simple evidence for the events of Wordsworth's life on the following grounds :—

1. Wordsworth's recollections are considerably guided and influenced by his present ideals, especially in view of the nature of those ideals and the importance that is assigned in them to the period of childhood.

2. The very process of poetry involves the idealization or the universalization of individual experience. An emotion in the poet, or the recollection of that emotion in tranquillity, is the signal for a departure into the realm of the imagination. It is an escape into a wider reality. The personal has become the universal, and once in that free space, it is almost impossible to find the way back again to the limitations of person, place and time.

3. Self-visualization is always self-aggrandisement. The 'Prelude' is the story of 'the growth of a poet's mind' and the poet is conceived, not merely as William Wordsworth, but as an ideal character progressing towards a state of blessedness in which he shall be able to write that great philosophical poem conceived by Coleridge in the early years of their poetic faith.

Leslie Stephen has pointed out another characteristic of the 'Prelude' which obscures the self-revelation. It is that for Wordsworth a fact is mainly a peg upon which

to hang some poetical or philosophical conclusion. When, for example, he is crossing the Simplon, he supposes that the path is inviting him to ascend a lofty mountain. A peasant, luckily, informs him that he has crossed the Alps already, and must go down hill thenceforwards. This remark suggests a series of reflections upon 'that awful power' imagination. It convinces him that 'our being's heart and home' is with infinitude and only there. When a trivial incident starts a man at once upon such distant reveries serving as a mere taking-off place for a flight into the clouds, we see that we must not count upon definite, concrete information. Even when he speaks, not of external facts, but of the history of his own opinions, he generally plunges into generalities so wide that their precise application is not very easy to discover. As the critic says, between the general truth and the particular application there are certain 'middle axioms' which Wordsworth leaves us to supply for ourselves.

Professor Garrod, on the other hand, assumes that "not only are poets commonly a more truthful race than other men, but that they frequently understand themselves better than other people understand them." Professor Legouis says that "The Prelude" is all true, though it does not present us with the whole truth. Wordsworth sees his early life through an optimistic prism. "Beyond doubt, this poem was meant to be a selection of all the circumstances in his early life that told for joy and hope. Hence, a heightening of bright colours, and a voluntary omission of more sombre hues, in the picture he made of his Youth. But the contrast between the dry facts of his early life and his rapture over the same period is,

also, owing to a deeper truth. The joy he celebrates in 'The Prelude' springs from sources hidden from all eyes, scarcely suspected by the child himself. Whatever shadows might pass over his days, abundant strength and happiness lay beneath the surface."

Raleigh remarks: "No such another authentic and minute poetic biography exists, it may safely be said, in any tongue. The genius of Wordsworth was a genius that naturally turned inward upon itself; and in this psychological account of the growth of his own mind, and of the most significant of the influences that shaped it, he has done the biographer's work once and for all. It would be foolish to challenge the truth of his account, and, so far as the critic's task is concerned, it would be vain to try to supplement it." "The 'Prelude' is one long exercise of memory, reaching back over the gulf that separated him, in the first flush of his power and maturity, from his younger self. He is throughout punctiliously careful not to confuse his present with his former emotions. He knows that the light in which he sees his early days is a light half reflected on them, but his readers seldom follow him carefully enough to make the distinction. They miss the clearest of his guidance in their search for the marvellous boy of popular biography."

Herford remarks: "For the poet of 1804 looked back on those experiences of his adolescence from the vantage-ground of a memory which did not distort but sifted and purified, and of a matured power of expression which did not embellish, but made explicit and individual."

As it stands 'The Prelude' has not merely a unity of design ; it has something of epic structure. **The 'Prelude' as an epic.** It has episodes and vicissitudes and a climax.

Elton remarks : " It is skilfully ordered for its purpose, for it begins at the end : the poet, at the age of twenty-nine is now safe in haven, and relates his long past voyage of the soul and imagination. And he ends with the dreams and consolations which had dawned upon his childhood, which had been deadened or clouded, but which have at last come back to him, ratified by experience, for good and all. The poem thus goes a kind of circuit." It opens with an outburst of joy that after years of anxiety the poet is at last free to devote his life to its true vocation : its ' last word of personal concern ' records his gratitude for the gift which brought him that freedom. Within this frame he places the history of his life from the seedtime of infancy to those days when chanting alternate songs with Coleridge as they roamed the Quantock hills together, he was first fully conscious that his genius was bearing fruit.

On the subject of this poem, Selincourt remarks : " Wordsworth was in evident agreement with Milton on the true nature of the epic subject. Both of them repudiated military exploits, ' hitherto the only argument heroic deemed,' in the desire to bring within its confines a more spiritual conflict. Only the pedant will dissent from their conception ; and those who regard the mind of Wordsworth as both great in itself and essentially representative of the highest, the imaginative type of mind, will recognize its adventures as a fit theme of epic treatment." Wordsworth himself was humbler in his comments on the

'Prelude.' He admitted, indeed, that 'it was a thing unprecedented in literary history, that a man should talk so much about himself.' 'It is not self-conceit,' he wrote, 'that has induced me to do this, but real humility. I began the work because I was unprepared to treat any more arduous subject, and diffident of my own powers. Here, at least, I hoped that to a certain degree I should be sure of succeeding, as I had nothing to do but describe what I had felt and thought; therefore could not easily be bewildered. This might certainly have been done in narrower compass by a man of more address; but I have done my best.'

Herford has pointed out one flaw in the epic structure of this poem. He says: "A poet who was consciously bent on composing epic, and not on relating the growth of his mind, would not have interposed those somewhat disconcerting pauses—the Fifth Book on his boyish reading, the Eighth a 'retrospect' of what was already told; nor would he have allowed the Sixth Book (Residence in London) to be left so 'unstitched' as, through mere fidelity to recollection, it remains. But interest and structural power return with the Ninth Book."

Selincourt points out that though 'The Prelude' was not written, like some of 'The Lyrical Ballads,' to illustrate a theory of poetic diction, yet it demonstrates clearly enough that 'a selection from the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure.' For its language is selected from the whole of his experience, and the style to which he moulds it rises with the character and the intensity of the emotion it has to

**Style and
diction of the
poem.**

express. Says Coleridge in 'Anima Poetae': "In these little poems...he wrote, at times, too much with a sectarian spirit, in a sort of bravado. But now he is at the helm of a noble bark; now he sails right onward; it is all open ocean and a steady breeze, and he drives before it, unfretted by short tacks, reefing and unreefing his sails, hauling and disentangling the ropes. His only disease is the having been out of his element; his return to it is food to famine; it is both the specific remedy and the condition of health." Wordsworth's style is apparently simple and natural, but there lies behind it intense study and careful artistry. The fragrance of Spenser is recalled on several pages of 'The Prelude.' Reminiscences of Shakespearean scene and phrasing abound. Miltonic echoes can be heard in most unexpected places and the style in more eloquent passages takes on a distinctly Miltonic manner. Yet 'his style is Wordsworthian as truly as Milton's is Miltonic.' The loftiest passages of the 'Prelude' are nobly bare, of almost scriptural plainness, 'consummately right, in a large austere way,' in the true Wordsworthian manner.

The poem is in blank verse and Wordsworth chose this metre with a full consciousness of its pitfalls. Wordsworth easily drops into the rhythmical heaviness of Milton's imitators and sometimes closes his period, with 'the wooden slam that is common in Thomson,' as in

'This labour will be welcome, honoured Friend!'

But, as Elton points out, in happy hour he can build up a sure, a concerted, and a varied music of his own :

"Near,

The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds,

Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light ;
 And in the meadows and the lower grounds
 Was all the sweetness of a common dawn—
 Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
 And labourers going forth to till the fields."

There are two versions of 'The Prelude'—the text of 1805-6 and the text of 1850. Wordsworth **Different versions of** had a mind to postpone the publication of 'The Prelude.' this poem till after his death. Hence for thirty-five years he continually came back to it, retouching and revising, with the result that the poem which appeared in 1850 differed in many respects from that which he read to Coleridge in 1806. Selincourt says : " The poet, Wordsworth knew well, was a craftsman, who must toil with unremitting patience at every detail of his work, till it has gained a clearer outline, a fuller substance ; not otherwise could it acquire that organic power which is the sure touchstone of art : "The vital spirit of a perfect form." The labour that Wordsworth bestowed on revision was at least equal to that of first composition, and was pursued when less scrupulous artists would have been well content to leave their work untouched."

The original 'Prelude' remained unpublished until its issue in 1926 by the editorial labour and scholarship of Mr de Selincourt.

Wordsworth took up revision in 1839. On March 28, of that year Miss Fenwick wrote to Sir Henry Taylor, that 'the beloved old poet' had been 'labouring for the last month, seldom less than six or seven hours a day, or rather one ought to say the whole day, for it seemed

always in his mind,' at 'the revising of his grand autobiographical poem.'

Stylistically, the revision was by no means wholly for the worse. Some of the slovenliness as well as much of the easy charm of familiarity disappeared. Many proper names were cancelled; many conversational familiarities and other clumsy simulations of 'the language really spoken by men' were pruned; languid constructions were braced; loose-jointed sentences made compact. Among Mr de Selincourt's happiest finds are the occasional additions, at points where the flagging and failing imagination, at the spur of some still vivid recollection suddenly evoked by his own narrative, has found a phrase which lends a glory to the whole context. Such are the lines on Newton's monument:

"The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone"
(*Prelude* III)

and the line which crowns the description of the October hills of Lakeland, as he left them after his first vacation:

"The coves and heights
Clothed in the sunshine of the withering fern."
(*Prelude* VI)

At places Wordsworth has missed the beauty of the unadorned and put instead a more ornate or more sonorous phrase. Thus, telling how his imagination in boyhood was haunted in his walks by the tales of the mountain land, he wrote, in 1805, of

"Tales...which in my walks
I carried with me among crags and woods
And mountains."
(*Prelude* VIII)

This became, in 1839,
 " Tales...of which the rocks
 Immutable and overflowing streams,
 Where'er I roamed, were speaking monuments."

(*Prelude* VIII)

Says de Selincourt : "This anxiety to write up his poem, and give it a more definitely literary flavour, creates in places the impression of pompous phrase-making which is farther removed than overbold simplicity from the true Wordsworthian spirit." Yet viewed as a whole the style is adequate to its theme. "Wordsworth has been ridiculed for failing to attain to the great manner when he was not attempting it, but was playing upon his youthful foibles that gentle mockery which naturally takes a mock-heroic form : more often he has been attacked as prosaic when his simple matter called for the plainest speech. His first aim, as it was his great achievement, was sincerity ; and the sole stylistic error of his later revision lies in a too generous concession to the vulgar taste for poetical ornament."

Changes of idea were rather unfortunate. Many of them are criticism directed by a man of seventy winters against his own past. As Herford says : "He was trying to repaint a picture drawn from one viewpoint so that it would look as if drawn from another. The result was, if not confusion, a loss of intellectual coherence, often betrayed by the awkward attempts to conceal it, which was responsible for much misunderstanding of the poem, and of the poet's whole position." Wordsworth attempted to translate the convictions of 1805 in the light of his later Tory and ecclesiastical faith, and the result was disastrous.

Ker says: "By keeping back 'The Prelude' Wordsworth made 'The Excursion' his most authoritative work regarding his own temper and ideas. 'The Prelude' is a story of life and will, not merely of meditations and theories. The purpose of the book is to show that his reflections spring from what is alive. Wordsworth's life comes out as a life of pure energy from the beginning, wakeful, alert, self-willed."

Elton says: "The charm of the poem is found in its soft interfusion of story, scenery, and high reflective matter. Reflection no doubt preponderates, and is sometimes beaten unendurably thin, and in the later books is lumpy with pedantry; but the tale recovers itself at the last with unexpected freshness...The verse, at its best, advances like a slow river in flood which casts up a clear-tempered light from its moving levels."

Myers says: "Nor are there many men who, in recounting the story of their own lives, could combine a candour so absolute with so much of dignity—who could treat their personal history so impartially as a means of conveying lessons of general truth—or who, while chronicling such small things, could remain so great."

Herbert Read says: "The Prelude" is "the epic of the man of feeling."

There was a Boy

Wordsworth's triumph lies in poetical psychology. He had an extraordinary faculty of giving utterance to some of the most elementary and, at the same time, obscure, sensations of man confronted by natural phenomena. In this poem we have a boy who blew mimic hootings to the silent owls that they might respond to his

call ; but as he hangs listening in silence, he is suddenly and deeply impressed by the roar of the cataracts or by the still beauty of the scenery, which come upon him unawares, a new and unexpected revelation to ear and eye. These lines are a fine instance of Wordsworth's self-withdrawing mood in gazing at external things. They reveal the full depth of the human imagination and the inexhaustible wealth of Nature's symbols. R. H. Hutton says: "You feel in reading it that the lines "*a gentle shock of mild surprise has carried far into his heart the voice of mountain torrents,*" had for him an exactness as well as a fulness of meaning ;—for he shows a curious power of carefully discriminating the degrees of depth in his imaginations ; some lie near the surface ; others lie deeper, but still within the sphere of less meditative minds ; others spring from a depth far beyond the reach of any human soundings." Legouis remarks : 'The absolute truth of the analysis impresses one simultaneously with its beauty. The emotion is, surely, subtle, but, at the same time universal, and we have it here expressed once and for ever. No psychologist can expect to go further than this, no poet to hit on words more apposite and more harmoniously combined so as to make this little mystery of the soul palpable. When Coleridge read the poem in a letter from his friend, he said that, if he had met with these lines in a desert of Africa, he would have cried out 'Wordsworth' at once.' The same character is to be found in 'Nutting' and in 'Skating-scene.'

The qualification 'I believe' in the last four lines, is very Wordsworthian and illustrates at once Wordsworth's love of truth and his supreme self-possession 'calm, all

passion spent'—a self-possession which can never forget itself and often leads him to an inartistic description of irrelevant or prosaic details.

Yew-trees

This is the most imaginative of Wordsworth's poems. He gives us in this poem an impression of nature on which he hangs no moral. The description is self-sufficient and no philosophy has been tagged to it. As Legouis remarks: "There, you have Wordsworth's power laid bare, founded on his imaginative vision of natural aspects, yet not passing from this to a moral lesson."

Wordsworth first describes a yew-tree, standing single in Lorton Vale, 'of vast circumference and gloom profound,' 'of form and aspect too magnificent to be destroyed.' Then he gives a very impressive picture of the four yew-trees of Borrowdale, 'joined in one solemn and capacious grove.' He walks in their shade and there flows into his passive mind from Nature a vivid impression of gloom, of darkness and silence. Then his mind springs into activity, fastens on the impression, knits round it thoughts that are similar but different, thought of the sacred groves such as that where the Eumenides were worshipped, of groves where ancient powers were seen by wandering men, of death, of all those solemn moral powers that brood silently over Man. At last, out of both these working together, is born the imaginative creation, and there rises before his eyes an ideal grove in which the ghostly masters of mankind meet, and sleep, and offer worship to the Destiny that abides above them; while the mountain flood, far, far away, as if from another world, makes music to which they dimly listen. As a critic

remarks : " Nothing can be more intense in imagination, nor is there anything more unique in English poetry."

This poem is a good example of the reciprocal action and reaction of Nature and the human mind repeated till of the merely material scene beheld little remains except its essential characteristics, intensified by becoming abstracted from all accessories. Nature's aspects are things half perceived by man and half created :

' Or by the power of a peculiar eye

Or by predominance of thought oppressed.'

It is the mysterious commerce between Intellect and the external world that creates the vision of beauty and glory. Here is " a certain colouring of the imagination " thrown over ordinary things whereby they are ' presented to the mind in an unusual aspect.' The ideal truth, in fact, passes immeasurably beyond the mere literal truth of fact in this poem. The " sable roof " of those yew-trees is not really sable ; but it is so dark that to the imagination it becomes a funeral pall. The red " unrejoicing berries " do not *deck* it and are not there for ' festal purpose ' ; but they would be festal elsewhere, though here by contrast their brightness only enhances the gloom which it cannot banish. No ghostly guests kneel among the mossy altars-stones or lie and listen to the far-off mountain floods ; but were such dread visitants permitted to the earth they could not choose a more fitting precinct, or be shadowed forth in outlines more spectral yet more strong.

In this poem Wordsworth displays a richer phrase and music than was usual with him. In the words of Raleigh, he writes here in the style of the metaphysical imagination and writes magnificently. He resumes the

device of personification ; ' a pillared shade ' where ghostly shapes

“ May meet at noontide ; Fear and trembling Hope,
Silence and Foresight ; Death the Skeleton,
And Time the Shadow.”

The use of the proper name ' *Glaramara's* inmost caves,' is as sonorous as Milton's ' the brooks of *Vallambrosa*,' and more soft and delicate and strange. The whole line 'Murmuring from *Glaramara's* inmost caves' has very aptly been compared to a long-drawn gust of air.

Resolution and Independence

This poem was composed in 1802. It was originally called 'The Leech-gatherer.' Wordsworth wrote : " This old man I met a few hundred yards from my cottage [at Town-end, Grasmere] ; and the account of him is taken from his own mouth." Wordsworth has himself dwelt on the significance of this poem. He says : " I will explain to you, in prose, my feelings in writing that poem. I describe myself as having been exalted to the highest pitch of delight by the joyousness and beauty of nature ; and then as depressed, even in the midst of these beautiful objects, to the lowest dejection and despair. A young poet in the midst of the happiness of Nature is described as overwhelmed by the thoughts of the miserable reverses which have befallen the happiest of all men, viz., poets. I think of this till I am so deeply impressed with it, that I consider the manner in which I am rescued from my dejection and despair almost as an interposition of Providence. A person reading the poem with feelings like mine will have been awed and controlled, expecting something spiritual or supernatural. What is brought forward ?

A lonely place, 'a pond, by which an old man *was*, far from all house or home ;' not *stood*, nor *sat*, but *was*—the figure presented in the most naked simplicity possible. The feeling of spirituality or supernaturalness is again referred to as being strong in my mind in this passage. How came he here ? thought I, or what can he be doing ? I then describe him, whether ill or well is not for me to judge with perfect confidence ; but this I *can* confidently affirm, that though I believe God has given me a strong imagination, I cannot conceive a figure more impressive than that of an old man like this, the survivor of a wife and ten children, travelling alone among the mountains and all lonely places, carrying with him his own fortitude, and the necessities which an unjust state of society has laid upon him. You speak of his speech as tedious when one does not read with the feelings of the author. 'The Thorn' is tedious to hundreds ; and so is 'The Idiot Boy' to hundreds. It is in the character of the old man to tell his story, which an impatient reader must feel tedious. But, good heavens ! such a figure, in such a place ; a pious, self-respecting, miserably infirm and pleased old man, telling such a tale."

Wordsworth met the leech-gatherer on the road at Grasmere but in the poem he shifts the scene to show the old man at his work and to set him among elemental powers akin to his majestic and indomitable spirit. There is the happiest harmony between the aspects of nature and the movements of the human mind, as successively presented. It has been a night of rains and tempest ; but when the sun rises calm and bright, Nature suddenly changes her mood ; the birds sing in 'the distant woods ;

the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters ; the grass is bright with rain-drops ; and the hare runs races on the wet moors, pursued by the mist that rises from beneath her feet. The treatment is accurate and first-hand. "The image of the hare," says Wordsworth, "I then observed on the ridge of the Fell." The lines

"All things that love the sun are out of doors,
The sky rejoices in the morning's birth"

are an illustration of Wordsworth's idea that Nature possesses a soul, a conscious existence, an ability to feel joy and love.

The poet catches the inspiration of the morning, and soars into a kindred ecstasy :

'The pleasant season did my heart employ :
My old remembrances went from me wholly ;
And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.'

But his mood undergoes a somersault. Exhausted by its own energies, his spirit droops from its eminence into a gulf of dim sadness and blind thoughts. There falls upon him a piercing thought—the contract between Nature's blissful creatures, bird and beast, and man, the being who 'looks before and after' ; whose very greatness is an exacting power ; who is charged with the weight of his own destinies ; who has duties as well as instincts, responsibilities no less than thoughts ; who must sow if he would reap ; who must discharge, not only high offices for others, but also the humblest for himself, and who, until he has discharged them, has not earned the privilege of forgetting himself, because such forgetfulness must keep him in a position of dependence on others, or of subjection to chance :

"But there may come another day to me—

Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty."

Raleigh remarks that the dejection, the sad fears and fancies that haunted the poet's thoughts, were no invention, for in the year 1800 his means of subsistence were nearing an end and he had devoted himself to poetry without winning substantial recognition.

Wordsworth, then, reflects on the lot of poets. He says that they begin in gladness but end in despondency and madness. He thinks of glorious young poets, Burns and Chatterton, dying in misery. As he stands thus arrested in the cloud of heavy thought, there appears to him the minister of consolation, as if by peculiar grace, a leading from above, a something given :

"Beside a pool bare to the eye of Heaven

I saw a man before me unawares ;

The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs." But he sees him as in a dream : his eye has long been resting, first on visions of glory, and next on visions of hate ; and now, when an old man stands before him—a living man—he seems to the poet as something of an apparition. He seems like 'a huge stone...on the bald top of an eminence,' that seems 'a thing endowed with sense' ; again he was like a

'Sea-beast that on a shelf

Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself.'

He is 'motionless as a cloud that heareth not the loud winds.' He seems 'not all alive nor dead, nor all asleep.' Altogether, as Charles William observes : 'The leech-gatherer is the impersonated thought of some other state of being.' The natural appearances to which he is com-

pared have something of mystery and dignity about them. Before he delivers his message the leech-gatherer is felt to be "a man from some far region sent."

In the scene, half-dialogue, half-narrative, that follows, the prosaic and the imaginative, to quote Herford, the frugal and the mystical strains in Wordsworth cross one another capriciously in the current of the stately stanza. In a rolling Alexandrine Wordsworth greets the old man :

'This morning gives us promise of a glorious day,' and then questions him as to his occupation, and why in his extreme old age he faces those lonely moors all alone. The old man makes answer 'from a feeble chest,' but courteously and 'in solemn order.' Wordsworth learns that he gains a livelihood by roaming the moors and gathering leeches from the pond. They are much scarcer, the old man says, than they used to be :

"Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may." His tale includes no demand for help. His was no chivalrous 'quest'—no martyr's sacrifice. It was that humblest of manly duties which a man owes to God after his life has long ceased to be of value to himself or others ; but it was discharged without self-pity, and without fear.

The longer the poet listens the stranger seems to him this mystery of power in the midst of decrepitude, a power, so unlike his own ; and the more visionary becomes the scene :

".....his voice to me was like a stream
Scarce heard ; nor word from word could I divide ;
And the whole body of the man did seem,
Like one whom I had met with in a dream."

His shape, his speech, 'the lonely place,' all trouble Wordsworth :

'In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
About the weary moors continually,
Wandering about alone and silently.'

These lines possess a style which arises from complete absorption of the poet in his inspiration, and seems to transcend all mere 'literary' art, a style, as Wordsworth himself termed it, 'inevitable,' justifying Arnold's remark that Nature herself seems to write his poem for him.

Then, with cheerful indifference, the old man proceeds to speak of 'other matter,' and the poet takes shame to himself by contrasting his own weakness with 'the firm mind' of 'that decrepit man.'

The central interest of the poem lies in the moral deduced, and that moral is distinctively Wordsworthian—namely, that through faith and fortitude a man may lift himself above the influence of external circumstance. It enforces the great truth that there exists something higher than the highest imagination—viz. the heroic heart which perseveres in duty to the last, no matter under what difficulties, and never suspects its own greatness. The moral comes out with the greater power because it comes out apparently without design. In respect of moral wisdom, this poem is very much similar to 'Laodamia.' As a critic remarks : "In each case the strongest effect left behind on the reader results from the challenge addressed to his moral being by a wisdom which belongs, in the first of these poems, to the region of the imagination, and which in the latter is blended with a stately passion, a passion restrained. Both poems abound in vivid imagery

and intense human heart; both address themselves not merely to our understanding but yet more to our sympathies; the lesson taught by the earlier one being that, so long as action is possible, the severest calamities should but develop our energies more and more; while the second tells us that, when the time for action is irrevocably past, a something greater than all action remains to us in absolute submission to the Divine Will. 'Resolution and Independence' is Wordsworth's most signal example of rough and massive strength steadied by the weight of a brooding mind."

This poem illustrates what is another quality of Wordsworth's poetry—the union of the strong and the touching. It has been said

'That bright, and fierce, and fickle is the South,
And dark and true, and tender is the North.'

Now Wordsworth's poetry is essentially that of the North. The strong old heart of Michael which is yet full of tenderness, of 'the milk of human kindness,' is its aptest symbol. Wordsworth has no use for showy qualities; but he has great respect for such qualities as industry and frugality, for severer virtues, for manlier ones. And his poetry delights to graft the softer virtues on the hardier stock.

It is interesting to compare the Wordsworth of 'Resolution and Independence' with the Wordsworth of 1792, and to see how far he has travelled during those ten years. When, in 1792, Wordsworth saw the girl with the heifer in the lane, he believed that a benignant spirit that was abroad would abolish the extreme of poverty. Now, when he sees the poor old man on the moor, he no longer

indulges himself with the vanities of the reformer and the large, easy hopes of the philanthropist but in humility of mind, seeks comfort from him :

“ “God,” said I, “ be my help and stay secure ;

I'll think of the leech-gatherer on the lonely moor !” ’

As Raleigh remarks : “The length of the journey is a measure of Wordsworth's spiritual progress.”

To see nothing but natural description and a moral purpose in this poem is to be very niggardly of appreciation and to miss its rare quality—that of passion in its highest form—the passion of the intellect and of the spirit in their ebb and flow ; the passion of the plastic imagination that moulds all the aspects of nature so as to reflect its own varying moods, now making to itself palpable monitors out of her most casual aspects, now resolving her plainest objects into dream that it may walk unembarrassed through worlds as visionary as its own. It is the fusing power of passion which imparts to this poem its perfect harmony of colouring, and converts into a spirit-moving reality that which, had its inner meanings proceeded from the didactic intellect alone, must have presented itself with all the coldness that belongs to allegory.

This poem may be regarded as the most powerful example of Wordsworth's earlier style—a style characterised by robustness, brooding meditation and truth at once to nature and to passion. Its language is the language not of declamatory passion but “passion steadied by its own weight” ; and, as a Victorian critic points out, in its Doric simplicity, almost roughness, it suits the theme far better than the polished diction of “*Loöadamia*” or “*Dion*” would have done.

This poem pre-eminently illustrates an idea that was constantly recurrent in Wordsworth's mind—the dignity and interest of man as man, depicted with no complex background of social or political life, but as moulded by the great influences of Nature, the foster-mother of his spirit and set amid the primary affections and sorrows. If the poet recognised in the 'decrepit man' before him a stately messenger 'from some far region sent,' it was because he gazed on that feeble form with that *creative* eye which he had ever bent upon Nature, and because he had received from both alike 'the light reflected' of his own intelligence, as "a light bestowed." Raleigh aptly remarks: "It is by a great imaginative gift that Wordsworth sees man in his surroundings; his men are spirits of the Earth, wrought upon by the elements from which they are compounded. Hence in his descriptions of humanity there is a kind of magic purity; the influences of earth and sky are everywhere felt in human feature and character."

Bradley calls this poem 'the most Wordsworthian of Wordsworth's poems, and the best test of ability to understand him,' and he discovers the source of its moving effect in the confusion, the almost hypnotic obliteration of the habitual reasoning mind, that falls on the poet as he gazes at the leech-gatherer, and hears, without understanding, his plain reply to the enquiry about himself and the prosaic 'occupation' he 'pursues.' Here are again, says Bradley, the fallings from us, vanishings, blank misgivings, dim fore-feelings of the soul's infinity.

The leech-gatherer also illustrates Wordsworth's habit of introducing solitary figures. Wordsworth's solitary

figures communicate a strange sensation of semi-mystical fear. Examples are the soldier (Book IV of the *Prelude*); the beggar (Book VII of the *Prelude*); the girl (Book XII *Prelude*); 'the single sheep and the one blasted tree' (Book XII); Margaret (in the 'Affliction of Margaret'); the old Cumberland Beggar; the Solitary Reaper. Of the London beggar Wordsworth says that his own 'mind turned round as with the might of waters':

"And on the shape of that unmoving man,
His steadfast face and sightless eyes, I gazed
As if admonished from another world."

Wordsworth describes an old soldier suddenly seen, leaning against a mile-stone on the moon-lit road, all alone:

'No living thing appeared in earth or air;
And, save the flowing water's peaceful voice,
Sound there was none...'

'...companionless

No dog attending, by no staff sustained,
He stood.'

'...still his form

Kept the same awful steadiness—at his feet
His shadow lay, and moved not.'

These are 'unnerving apparitions,' and, as Charles Williams remarks, they came to Wordsworth like the incarnations of the otherness he had in childhood known more vaguely in the 'low breathings' or the peak which called up

'Huge and mighty forms that do not live
Like living men.'

The leech-gatherer is probably the 'greatest of these unnerving apparitions.

Yarrow Unvisited

In 1803 Wordsworth and Dorothy were on the point of visiting the Yarrow, so famous in the history and romance of the Border, but decided to reserve the pleasure for some future occasion. The charm of "Yarrow Unvisited" consists in the pretended indifference with which Wordsworth evades the importunity of his companion, who urges him to visit it.

It opens in a light and frolicsome vein. Dorothy desires to

'Turn aside and see the Braes of Yarrow.'

To her wish, the poet replies: 'We have seen so many famous rivers all Scotland over; so many famous streams lie before us yet to see—Galla Water, Leader Haughs, Dryburgh by the 'Chiming Tweed,' 'pleasant Tiviot-dale.' And then he breaks out:

'What's Yarrow, but a river bare

That glides the dark hills under?

There are a thousand such elsewhere

As worthy of your wonder.'

His sister looks up in his face, to think he could speak so disparagingly of Yarrow. To her look the poet replies in a somewhat more serious strain, admits that there must be something worth their seeing in Yarrow—the green holms, the fair flowing river—but these for the present they must pass by, and must allow

'The swan on still Saint Mary's Lake,

Float double, swan and shadow.'

This is the only touch of extraneous beauty in the poem, the beauty of which is otherwise all confined to the thought itself.

The stanzas that follow have the deep undertone of feeling which lay beneath all the lighter chaff and seeming indifference and carelessness :

“ Be Yarrow stream unseen, unknown,

It must or we shall rue it ;

We have a vision of our own ;

Ah ! why should we undo it ?

Loved Yarrow, have I won thee ;

A ray of Fancy still survives—

Her sunshine plays upon thee !”

Shairp has pointed out an inaccuracy of fact in the lines :

“ Where was it that the famous flower

Of Yarrow Vale lay bleeding ?”

Mary Scott of Dryhope, the real “ Flower of Yarrow,” never did lie bleeding on Yarrow, became the wife of Wat of Hardon, and the mother of a wide-branching race. Yet Wordsworth speaks of *his* bed evidently confounding the lady ‘ Flower of Yarrow ’ with that ‘ Slaughtered youth for whom so many ballads had sung lament.’

“ Compared with ‘ Yarrow Unvisited ’ ‘ Yarrow Visited ’ does not go with such a swing from end to end. The second poem has in it more of contemplative pause than the first. There is more irregularity in the quality of its stanzas, some of them rising to an excellence which Wordsworth has not surpassed, and which has impressed them on the poetic memory as possession for ever, others sinking down to the level of ordinary poetic workmanship.”

“ Yarrow Revisited ” is a memorial of a day passed with Sir Walter Scott, and other friends, visiting the Banks

of the Yarrow under his guidance, immediately before his departure from Abbotsford, for Naples.

We have first the picture of the present ; and, as the memory of the past, with its regrets, naturally follows, the poet, as usual, shakes himself free from this regret in recognising the beauties of happier years, to win the higher spiritual insight that

“ The visions of the past

Sustain the heart in feeling

Life as she is—our changeful life,

With friends and kindred dealing.”

The Yarrow poems very well illustrate Wordsworth's method of treating Nature : first a subjection of the mind to the scene or object of feeling studied ; then a withdrawing into his deeper self to exhaust its meaning.

Michael

This poem was included in the enlarged collection of ‘Lyrical Ballads.’ Wordsworth called it a ‘pastoral poem,’ thus challenging comparison with the conventional pastoralism. The story itself, he explains, was the first of those ‘domestic tales’ of his native region which had interested him even as a boy. “Homely and rude” he admits it to be ; yet he proposes to tell it “for the delight of a few natural hearts” and in the firm conviction that the emotions may be stirred without that “outrageous stimulation” by sensational incident against which it was in part the object of his Preface to protest. He wrote to his friend Thomas Poole : “I have attempted to give a picture of a man of strong mind and lively sensibility, agitated by two of the most powerful affections of the human heart—the parental affection and the love of pro-

perty, *landed* property, including the feelings of inheritance, home, and personal and family independence." Michael himself, as he told Charles James Fox, is in fact a kind of type of those "statesmen," or "independent proprietors of land" who "are now almost confined to the north of England" and "whose little tract of land serves as a kind of rallying point for their domestic feelings, as a tablet upon which they are written, which makes them objects of memory in thousand instances, when they would otherwise be forgotten."

An earnest, ethical aim lies at the back of this poem, which reveals Wordsworth's deep regard and concern for human nature. Wordsworth writes to Charles James Fox in 1802: "The poems ['Michael' and 'The Brothers'] are faithful copies from nature, and I hope, whatever effect they may have upon you, you will at least be able to perceive that they may excite profitable sympathies in many kind and good hearts, and may in some small degree enlarge our feelings of reverence for our species, and our knowlege of human nature, by showing that our best qualities are possessed by some whom we are too apt to consider, not with reference to the points in which they resemble us, but to those in which they manifestly differ from us...The two poems which I have mentioned were written with a view to show that men who do not wear fine clothes can feel deeply."

In a short and complimentary answer Fox informed the poet that he had read the two poems "with particular attention," but did not find much in them, naming at the same time four poems as his favourites, two of which were "Harry Gill" and "The Idiot Boy."

Coleridge so felt the beauty, sacredness and force of the ethical purpose of Wordsworth that, after reading the second volume of the "Lyrical Ballads," he wrote to Godwin : "I should judge of a man's heart and intellect, precisely to the degree and intensity of the admiration with which he read these poems."

Wordsworth introduces an interesting bit of mental history before entering upon his story. He says :

"It was the first
Of those domestic tales that spake to me
Of shepherds, dwellers in the valleys, men
Whom I already loved ;—not verily
For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills
Where was their occupation and abode.
And hence this Tale, while I was yet a Boy
Careless of books, yet having felt the power
Of Nature, by the gentle agency
Of natural objects, led me on to feel
For passions that were not my own, and think
(At random and imperfectly indeed)
On man, the heart of man, and human life."

The subject of the tale is an aged shepherd who lives in Grasmere Vale :

"An old man, stout of heart and strong of limb
His bodily frame had been from youth to age
Of an unusual strength ; his mind was keen,
Intense and frugal, apt for all affairs."

But that strong old heart has tenderness in it. For many years that tenderness has been chiefly spent upon the small patrimony which, during successive centuries had descended to him from his brave and humble forefathers,

and which forty years of pious toil have at last cleared from debt. Dearly has he loved those hills and fields

“ Which had impressed

So many incidents upon his mind,
Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear ;
Which, like a book, preserved the memory
Of the dumb animals whom he had saved,
Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts
The certainty of honourable gain.”

At last, and beyond hope, a child is born to him :

“ To Michael's heart

The son of his old age was yet more dear—
Less from instinctive tenderness, the same
Blind spirit which is in the blood of all—
Then that a child more than all other gifts,
Bring hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts.”

The old man and his son are inseparable companions until the latter has reached his eighteenth year. Then calamity falls upon the mountain home ; a kinsman has failed in business, and Michael, who had stood security for him, finds himself liable for the debt :

“ “ Isabel,” said he,

“ I have been toiling more than seventy years
And in the open sunshine of God's love
Have we all lived ; yet if these fields of ours
Should pass into a stranger's hand, I think,
That I could not lie quiet in my grave.”’

The old man resolves, though not without misgivings on his wife's part, to send his son to a distant relative in the city, in the hope that he might be able to retrieve his parents' loss. Before the boy leaves home, his father takes

him to a dell in the mountains, where they had carried stone to build a sheepfold. Here the father tells his son the story of his love for him from birth, and gives him wholesome counsel. He bids him to lay the corner stone of the sheepfold, which would serve as a memorial of this sacred hour. The youth does so, and departs. At first all goes well; but at last the town life leads to evil courses and he is driven "to seek a hiding-place beyond the seas." The father, broken-hearted, but sustained by the power of his love, survives seven years after learning of his son's downfall :

"There is a comfort in the strength of love ;
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
Would upset the brain, or break the heart."

He continues building the sheepfold, but sinks into his grave before completing the work, and the place, which, to him and his ancestors has been for generations the object of affection and toil, soon becomes the property of strangers :

" 'Tis not forgotten yet
The pity which was then in every heart
For the old man ; and 'tis believed by all
That many and many a time he thither went,
And never lifted up a single stone."

Michael is one of Wordsworth's grandest men. He has the air of being a part of nature, a 'bit of mountain expression.' His character is composed of essentials. The ruined sheepfold which alone remains to tell of Michael's tragedy is a simple yet poignant symbol of the desolation wrought in his heart by the loss of his son. It is the robustness of this rocky idyll that makes its pathos. The

pathos is gathered into the single line, once chosen by Arnold as the most Wordsworthian he ever wrote, which tells how Michael, after the boy's loss, 'never lifted up a single stone.' The pathos is elemental and it has been brought out without any adventitious aids such as lesser poets used. Wordsworth shuns all dramatic developments that are not inherent in the event itself. His directing will does not make itself felt throughout. He does not impose his judgments on his characters and on the reader. He is satisfied with the solemnity and weight of the mere event. Compare 'Michael' with Tennyson's 'Enoch Arden' and Wordsworth's special power will shine by contrast.

'Michael' well illustrates Wordsworth's economy and skill in narrative. Unlike Crabbe's, Wordsworth's tales are not long and tedious. Says Elton: "Crabbe's matter-of-fact treatment was a warning to his successor. Much that we relish keenly in Crabbe has departed in Wordsworth; the whole sardonic ingredient, the touch of warranted and experienced bitterness. But instead of this there is the idealizing touch which it is Wordsworth's secret to blend with the calm veracity of his report. The sorrows of Michael and of the Wanderer in 'The Brothers' fall into their place in a large, tranquil, judiciously ordered scheme of things, and are to be read in the light of a hopefulness, which does not rest on such a simple piety as might console the sufferers themselves, but on a sense that such troubles are as recurrent as winter storms or floods: 'and wherever should we grieve,' since after all they are troubles nobly met? This attitude may not console everybody, but there is no doubt of its value to Words-

worth's art. The philosophy that sees events and catastrophes so calmly, measuring all mischances by the firmness of spirit that is evoked to need them, gives an epic grandeur to these exalted homely idylls. Nor does the chorus intrude unduly. In his best pieces, Wordsworth is not like a lecturer who chequers a lovely tale with his own valuable remarks. His large comment comes in easily."

In this poem the characters of nature have been caught and expressed not by description but by incorporation when the image of the outward world is reflected in the feelings and shines through the most indifferent words. Here, says Legouis, scenery, characters and style form a perfect harmony of lines and tints that could not have existed without a secret process of assimilation : " Lofty and bare, indeed, is this pastoral ; few flowers grow on the heights where old Michael meant to build his sheep-fold. The land is unadorned. It has no other features than the sheer lineaments of its sweeps and pastures or its steep rocks, over which are spread by turns the naked sky and the winter mists. All this, together with the bracing air, you feel from the first to the last line, not less when the poet gives you the speech of his ancient ' states-man ' or a glimpse of his stern mind, than when he paints the landscape itself...Every syllable the old man utters is an emanation from the pastoral mountains."

To the Cuckoo

It was written in 1804, composed in the orchard, Townsend, Grasmere.

Being so rarely seen, the cuckoo appears to the poet to be a mysterious bird. It is "a wandering voice," "an

invisible thing." Its song recalls to him in manhood the golden time of boyhood ; and makes the earth seem once more, as it seemed then, a fairy place, bright with hope and gay with fancy's dreams.

On the lines :

" O Cuckoo ! shall I call thee Bird,

Or but a wandering voice"

Wordsworth's own note is: " This concise interrogation characterises the seeming ubiquity of the voice of the cuckoo, and dispossesses the creature almost of a corporeal existence : the Imagination being tempted to this exertion of her power by consciousness in the memory that the cuckoo is almost perpetually heard throughout the season of spring, but seldom becomes an object of sight."

The voice of the cuckoo is one of those sudden monitions which start up from the wayside of life and awaken vague echoes in the memory. It reminds Wordsworth of schoolboy days, and the world again seems phantasmal to his perceptions. Wordsworth relates how he was often unable to think of external things as having real existence in the days of his boyhood, and this is best illustrated by some lines of *Immortality Ode* :

" But for those obstinate questionings

Of sense and outward things,

Fallings from us, vanishings,

Blank misgivings of a creature

Moving about in worlds not realized."

As Raleigh remarks: " The experiences he most values are those which carry him farthest on the backward road."

Palgrave remarks : " This poem has an exaltation and a glory, joined with an exquisiteness of expression which

place it in the highest rank among the many master-pieces of its illustrious author." The rhythm is iambic. The lines have alternately four and three accents.

According to Bradley, *all* poetic experience is, in a sense, hostile to sense. But he indicates that this experience is, broadly speaking, of two different kinds. In one kind of experience the hostility is hostility to *mere* sense and the 'spiritual' world is only a fuller apprehension of the sensible world. In the other kind, there is always some feeling of definite contrast with the limited sensible world. The poem of the Daffodils is an example of the one, the *Ode on Immortality* of the other. 'To the Cuckoo' stands near the boundary between these two modes of imagination. As Bradley remarks: "It stands near the boundary because, like the poem on the Daffodils, it is entirely happy. But it stands unmistakably on the further side of the boundary, and is, in truth, more nearly allied to the *Ode on Immortality* than to the poem on the Daffodils. The sense of sight is baffled, and its tyranny broken. Only a cry is heard, which makes the listener look a thousand ways, so shifting is the direction from which it reaches him. It seems to come from a mere 'voice' 'an invisible thing,' 'a mystery.' It brings him 'a tale' of 'visionary hours,'—hours of childhood, when he sought this invisible thing in vain, and the earth appeared to his bewildered but liberated fancy 'an unsubstantial fairy place.' And still, when he hears it, the great globe itself, we may say, fades like an unsubstantial pageant, or, to quote from the *Immortality Ode*, the 'shades of the prison-house' melt into air. These words are much more solemn than the cuckoo poem; but the experience

is of the same type and 'the visionary gleam' of the Ode, like the 'wandering voice' of the poem, is the expression through sense of something beyond sense."

The Solitary Reaper

This poem was inspired in part by his own experience, in part by that of another. The sight of the reapers in the harvest fields through which the tourists passed recalled to Wordsworth's mind "a beautiful sentence in a MS. 'Tour in Scotland' written by a friend, the last line being taken from it verbatim." The reference is to the following passage in Thomas Wilkinson's 'Tours to the British Mountains' (published in 1824): 'Passed a female who was reaping alone; she sang in Erse, as she bended over her sickle; the sweetest human voice I ever heard; her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious, long after they were heard no more.' Such is the origin of 'The Solitary Reaper.'

It was written between 1803 and 1805; first published in 1807; in 1815—1820 placed among 'Poems of the Imagination.'

The first four lines merely relate the incident. Wordsworth is walking on a Scottish hill. He catches sight of a girl reaping in the fields across the valley. He hears her singing. The sight and the sound impress him:

'Behold her, single in the field
Yon solitary Highland lass!
Reaping and singing by herself.
Stop here, or gently pass.'

"Behold her" by its slightly formal tone, would indicate that Wordsworth is finding something arresting in the scene, something, as appears by "Stop here, or gently

pass," subtly pervading, the spell of which would be broken by the hurry past of heedless travellers. Is it the sight of the figure reaping, or the sound of her singing, which is working the mystery? Both perhaps, but mainly the song. For although the lonely figure bent to the daily task is as picturesque as are Millet's peasants, the impression it gives is, like his, of the familiar lot and its nameless obscurity.

The next lines take us to the source of the spell; she sings 'a melancholy strain.' A strain, not a song; the words, may be, swallowed by the distance, so that only the spirit of the music penetrates to the listener. But the strain is working a miracle:

'Oh, listen, for the vale profound

Is overflowing with the sound.'

This is the first indication of the nature of the mystery. What is a 'vale profound.' The 'vale profound' is the deep valley when it has been filled in every nook by the distant strain, and so transmuted to something stranger than the deep valley it originally was. The sound has exalted the listener to an intenser sense, and has transfigured the scene.

Wordsworth then proceeds to describe his experience more fully, to recapture his sensations more completely. But the actual effect of the strain was so mysterious that he can describe it only by suggesting resemblances:

'No nightingale did ever chaunt

So sweetly to reposing bands

Of Travellers in some shady haunt

Among Arabian sands.'

But this suggests only one resemblance, namely, that the song of the nightingale, like the song of the reaper, creeps

pervasively over the spirit. The second picture is complementary and extends the first, adding the thrill of the moment when an unbroken horizon of silence which can be felt, suddenly leaps with the echoing vibrations of the cuckoo's voice :

‘ A voice so thrilling ne’er was heard
In springtime from the cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.’

Here more is meant than meets the ear. Besides explicit points of contact between the circumstances of these scenes and those of the reaper, other and subtler resemblances have entered, and given the poem another atmosphere, an atmosphere laden with the weight of solitude and melancholy. As a critic says : ‘ By calling up the deserts of Arabia and the Hebridean seas, the poet has sent our apprehensions careering through the universe, gathering as they go subtle suggestions of suffering and of sadness inseparable from the life of the world. The vast aridity of lifeless deserts ; way-worn travellers, exhausted by the immensity of barren places, for a moment charmed to vivid sleep by the magic voice of the nightingale, to be awakened on the morrow only to intenser sense of the solitude of the world about them. Then from the wastes of the earth we traverse an ominous expanse of ocean, and feel the threatening silence of black, unfathomable waters, all the more grimly when, for the moment, a note suggesting joy and spring and happiness echoes over their changeless unresponding surface. The cuckoo's cry itself becomes a voice of unavailing life, a plangent chord of everlasting woe. The scenes are heavy with all that

there is of misery and of sadness at the heart of the universe itself. And the mind now brings the sense of these things into the reaper's melancholy strain, which so acquires the weight of universal desolation.'

The next stanza completes the experience :

"Will no one tell me what she sings ?

Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow

For old, unhappy, far-off things,

And battles long ago."

Here our apprehensions are urged, not through realms of space, but back through the realms of time. Old, forgotten, far-off things have left their note of human loss and woe ; and these are now caught up in the burden of the singer's strain. It is the voice of melancholy itself charged with 'the sense of tears in things human,' with 'the still, sad music of humanity.' Brennan points out that these lines are an essential expression of the spirit of Celtic legend : "Of surviving races the Celtic have more than any other, a past of ruined glory, a cheerless present, to contemplate. The dreaming that dominates their nature leads them out of the present world into the shadowy past : that same dreaminess causes them to take a 'luxury in grief,' to brood fondly on the disaster that has followed their course in history, on

'Old unhappy far-off things

And battles long ago.'

Matthew Arnold has chosen, as typical of their poetry, the line from 'Ossian' :

'They went forth to the battle, but they always fell.'

This poetry survives, outside long unread manuscripts, only in the songs of peasants."

The next four lines are essentially Wordsworthian :

‘ Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of today,
Some natural sorrow, loss or pain,
That has been, and may be again ?’

Having given universal moment to a song, identifying it with the deepest griefs that ever were, Wordsworth then swiftly composes his quivering limbs and tracks it back again to the heart of the nameless girl, who but a brief while ago, was just a solitary reaper busied in the insignificant familiar toil of the day.

In the last stanza the haunting nature of the girl's strains is expressed :

‘ I listened, motionless and still ;
And, as I mounted up the hill
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.’

As the daffodils ‘ flash upon that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude,’ similarly the music continues to reverberate in Wordsworth's inward ear.

A critic remarks : ‘ The achievement of this poem is indeed a revaluation of human nature, a new way of looking on man and the universe, a new sense of the worth of human life. It is a revelation of a new world of spiritual values, in which the previously insignificant has taken on universal significance. It is a pre-vision of the spirit of democracy, a foresight of things which are coming to be. Wordsworth is discovering a new experience ; no one before him had seen what he saw, heard what he heard, and felt what he felt, in the solitary reaper's song.’

There is perhaps no other poem of Wordsworth which has so much verbal magic as this. The lines

'Will no one tell me what she sings
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago'

are some of the simplest that any poet ever wrote and yet, as Legouis says, their mere verbal felicity baffles the imitation of the most refined artists. Their suggestiveness reaches far beyond the obvious meaning of the words into depths that speech cannot plumb. They show at its very finest Wordsworth's gift of using the plainest words to spin a web that has all the vibration and all the mystery of a moonlit sky. They are mysterious, poignant, pathetic, haunting. In Bagehot's phrase, this poem is an example of 'pure art.' The perfection of pure art is 'to embody typical conception in the choicest, the fewest accidents; to embody them so that each of these accidents may produce its full effect, and so to embody them without effort.' In 'The Solitary Reaper' we have a scene and its sentiment, brought home with the minimum of words, the maximum of power. It has a unity in which all the parts are subordinate to the dominating sentiment; its imagery is appropriate and moderate; there is one tone and that all-pervading; there is no sign of effort; the total impression is undisturbed by isolated bursts of splendour.

The treatment of sound in this poem is typical of Wordsworth's practice. In 'What are you stepping westward,' the evening greeting, as it falls from human lips, blends with lake and air, and light, and sky. In 'The

Solitary Reaper,' we feel the song to be the very soul of the valley, and the voice of the reaper becomes almost a part of nature, working a 'human sweetness' into the landscape. A critic says: "The Reaper is a poem which Wordsworth alone could have written, such is the sympathetic softness with which Nature and human sentiment are blended in it. The poem is not an Elegy—there is more of sweetness than of sadness in the 'melancholy strain'; nor a Pastoral—there is nothing in it of changeful incident; nor a descriptive poem—we are not told whether trees diversify the field or a river engirds it. It is a poem of Nature and of Man, a melody at once and a picture, a record and a reverie."

The sense of solitude that pervades this poem is essential to it:

"Behold her, *single* in the field,
Yon *Solitary* Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing *by herself*;...
Alone she cuts and binds the grass."

As Bradley points out, all solitude and all things solitary had an extraordinary fascination for Wordsworth:

'And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.'

Solitary figures awaked 'the visionary power' in him; all loneliness was for him an opening into infinity; solitariness carried far into his heart the haunting sense of an 'invisible world.'

We cannot end this appreciation better than by quoting the declaration of Herbert Read that he 'would always send out "The Solitary Reaper" into the world of letters to represent the quintessence of English poetry.'

Character of the Happy Warrior

This poem is connected with Wordsworth's brother John's memory. Some of the features of this ideal portrait were admittedly derived from Nelson; but Nelson's relations with Lady Hamilton made it impossible for Wordsworth "to connect his name with the poem as I could wish, or even to think of him with satisfaction in reference to the idea of what a warrior ought to be." This he subsequently stated in a note in which he further declared that "many elements of the character here portrayed were found in my brother John." It is possible that some traits of Beaupuy have also passed into this poem.

The character may be regarded as a kind of personification of the ideal of the Ode to Duty. He has 'an inner light,' which makes the path before him always bright; but it is the light of high endeavour, the intense inner life of which Wordsworth was conscious in himself. The first definition of the happy warrior as one who

' When brought

Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought

Upon the plan that pleased his childish thought' corresponds to the conception of an ideal life expressed in the 'Rainbow' verses—one in which all the days are 'bound each to each by natural piety' and the 'child is father to the man.' His prime care is his moral being. He, by his profession, is brought into daily contact with the grimmest of facts and laws; it is his duty to make them subservient to the law for which he stands. Here the character of Nelson falls in with the lesson that Wordsworth teaches—the lesson, namely, that virtue grows by the strenuousness of its exercise, that it gains strength as it

wrestles with pain and difficulty, and converts the shocks of circumstance into an energy of its proper glow.

The happy warrior combines strength and tenderness, courage and purity. He is not compelled throughout the whole of a long life to 'stand and wait'; the crisis of action brings him the consummation of his happiness. He is a gentle and generous spirit :

" But who, if he be called upon to face
Some awful moment to which heaven has joined
Great issues, good or bad for human kind,
Is happy as a lover, and attired
With sudden brightness, like a man inspired."

In this eulogy Wordsworth depicts, as it were, the very summit of glory in the well-remembered aspect of Nelson in his last and greatest hour.

Then the tone of the poem changes and wordsworth's master-bias which leans to home-felt pleasures and to gentle scenes has its play. Myers remarks: "Compare with this the end of the 'Song of Brougham Castle,' where, at the words "alas! the fervent harper did not know—" the strain changes from the very spirit of chivalry to the gentleness of Nature's calm. Nothing can be more characteristic of Wordsworth than contrasts like this. They teach us to remember that his accustomed mildness is the fruit of no indolent or sentimental peace; and that, on the other hand, when his counsels are sternest, and "his voice is still for war," this is no voice of hardness or of vain glory, but the reluctant resolution of a heart which fain would yield itself to other energies, and have no message but of love." When Wordsworth wrote these verses, he had probably a thought of Nelson's womanly

tenderness and of his constant craving for the green earth and home affections in the midst of storm and war.

The happy warrior is finally the man who 'plays, in the many games of life, that one Where where he most doth value must be won,' who perseveres to the last, 'daily self-surpast,' who finds comforts in himself and in his cause and who, when he is about to die, 'draws his breath in confidence of Heaven's applause.' Herford remarks: "His lofty spiritual egoism is still apparent; it is a pagan rather than a Christian hero who draws his last breath 'in confidence of Heaven's applause'." Aubrey de Vere holds a different view. He says: "Wordsworth's ideal warrior has, despite some superficial resemblance, little in common with the *meaque me virtute involvo* of the pagan poet. His is a character founded on self-sacrifice, not self-assertion, one therefore that presupposes that 'liberty of spirit' which can exist alone where, the service of self having been annulled, room is made for a larger service. Though it makes no *direct* reference to Revelation, it is founded in the main on the great Christian tradition. The happy warrior has a heart full of that human hope and love which belong but to the restored Humanity; and he evinces a habit of moral faith which, even if it could have existed antecedently to a Divine Revelation, could hardly have failed to accept it upon its earliest understood challenge. In many of Wordsworth's later poems the Christianity which here exists implicitly is explicitly affirmed. There is notwithstanding a significant contrast between the concluding expression

"And, while the mortal mist is gathering, draws
His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause"

(although the lines need not mean more than the 'well done, good and faithful servant' of the Gospel), and the touching humility with which a poem published many years later ends :

"The best of what we do and are,
Just God, forgive."

This poem is, on the whole, foreign to the usual manner of Wordsworth's. As Oliver Elton remarks: "It is an Elizabethan poem, with echoes of Spenser's couplet and of Daniel's sweet austerity." It is, to some extent, in the manner of Sir H. Wotton's 'Character of a Happy Life.' Much of it is in a neutral style; its diction is of good prose and has no magical quality; its metre suggests a deliberate reversion to the 'heroic' manner of Pope's Homer. There is, as has been well said, "a Roman majesty in its simple and weighty speech." It is in this quality of weightiness that it surpasses Elizabethan poems of the same kind.

This poem has much in common with 'The White Doe of Rylstone.' As Raleigh remarks: "The virtue of the soldier, as of the lady, lies not in opposing ruthless necessity, but in accepting it, and aiming at a victory that may be won when "prayers for this cause or that" have been abandoned. And in both poems the happiness of clear vision, which enables man to be still the giver, not the stunned victim of a theft, is set high among human privileges."

Ode to Duty

"Wordsworth's 'Ode to Duty' (1805), produced at the turning-point of his career, is full of import and significance." About 1805 there takes place a change in

Wordsworth. Politically, it was caused by the beginning of the French Empire and the final overthrow of Wordsworth's sympathies for the Revolution and his consequent recoil to conservatism. Mary Hutchinson's quieting influence gradually supplanted Dorothy's impulsive companionship.

‘The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill—’

told for repose. The mere fact of his being married gradually checked the ‘guiltless Bohemianism’ of his youth. The duties and cares of the father of a large family grew upon him. On the top of all this came the loss of his brother John—a blow that ever after saddened his life. Coleridge, ‘the brother of his soul,’ fell a prey to opium and his growing distress became a source of anxiety to Wordsworth. He himself was feeling the wane of his ‘shaping spirit of imagination.’ It was in this state of mind and spirit that Wordsworth wrote the ‘Ode to Duty.’ He himself at this time needed ‘a light to guide,’ and he turned to duty for comfort.

Wordsworth here renounces that spontaneous and beautiful harmony that till now had been his dear belief. He does not abjure it as absolutely and as finally as he does in the Peel Castle poem, for he still mutters a hope that better days may come when we can completely rely upon love and joy for guidance. As Wordsworth looked back wistfully on the days when nature was to him all-in-all, when the sounding cataract haunted him like a passion and Nature was to him an appetite, even though he found ‘abundant recompense’ for such loss, in the same way he now looks, with wistful and loving regret,

upon the glad innocence of those who do duty's work and know it not. Wordsworth looks for a time, however, when the sphere of duty shall coincide with that of pleasure and our nature will become perfectly free from jarring elements. As Herford remarks: "The optimist in Wordsworth still dominates his thought. He cannot contemplate moral conflict as a permanent process; the triumph even of duty must not be won at the cost of anguish to the man who does her will." As for himself, he would still cling to the creed of duty, even though he preserved spirit enough to bear the shocks of change and enjoy his 'unchartered freedom.' Wordsworth's own note is: "Many and many a time have I been twitted by my wife and sister for having forgotten this dedication of myself to the stern law-giver. 'Transgressor indeed I have been, from hour to hour, from day to day: I would fain hope, however, not more flagrantly, or in a worse way than most of my tuneful brethren.'"

Wordsworth says that he would now like to obey the dictates of Duty more scrupulously than ever because he has grown tired of unwarranted liberty. But as Legouis points out, he still feels an uncertain convert: 'Thee I now would serve more strictly, *if I may*' The 'stern law-giver' at first inspires him with more fear than love. He only reconciles himself with the 'awful power' when he has realised that duty 'wears the Godhead's most benignant grace,' that there is nothing so fair as the smile upon her face, that from her emanates not only moral but physical law:

" Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And fragrance in thy footing treads;

Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
 And the most ancient Heavens through thee are fresh
 and strong."

Herford remarks: "Joy may thus still be divine; but it is a joy won through discipline and self-sacrifice. However remote in language and in the historic context of his thought, he is here at one with Kant when he found freedom to be the perfect obedience to law; and with Dante, when he saw that supreme power that moves the sun and the other stars to be Love."

(This poem is important in its moral bearings. It affirms that between the lower and higher sections of man's nature there commonly exists an antagonism, and that the condition of man's life is a militant condition. A few happier spirit may stand outside the battle and led on by 'the genial sense of youth' may advance along a flower-strewn path of virtue; but even these may fail through misplaced confidence; the path of virtue is rugged and men can only find peace while the saving arms of Duty are cast around them. To find true freedom they must subject themselves to a noble bondage. The view of liberty that Wordsworth here sets out is probably the most tenable in political theory. Liberty does not merely mean absence of restraint. Restraint is an evil only when it frustrates the life of spiritual enrichment. In subjection to a righteous law is found man's only freedom from a bondage to passions and caprices. The highest liberty does not essentially consist in choice between alternatives but in our *doing* willingly that which we do, and not doing it either from a servile compulsion or from a mechanical necessity. The poet looks around him, and from

every side the same lesson is borne in upon him. It is because they obey law that the flowers return in their seasons and the stars revolve in their courses; the law of Nature is to inanimate things what duty is to man. Moral struggle and the strenuousness of moral purpose must, Wordsworth teaches, ultimately issue in the abounding joy which comes to a nature attuned to the demands of eternal law.

This is one of the most majestic and beautiful of Wordsworth's poems and one of the noblest odes in the whole range of English literature. Its peculiar note is that criticism of life—that application of moral ideas to life which Arnold used to regard as constituting the enduring excellence of Wordsworth's poems.

Oliver Elton calls this poem an eighteenth-century classic. He says: "Gray and Horace are its models; it has therefore great majesty of sound, and is designed with much of the orderly and severe harmony that it celebrates. Wordsworth has forgotten his war against the diction of Gray, which here he uses with all its apostrophes, periphrases, antitheses, and ceremonies." The language of this poem is certainly not the language of common life which Wordsworth has recommended for poetical purposes, yet it must be recognised that it is not eighteenth-century in a bad sense. Some critic has pointed out that Wordsworth's diction, like his metre, ever advances in power and dignity proportionately to the thought and emotion it has to sustain. In this poem, too, the diction is in perfect accord with the poem. "It never draws our attention, as self-conscious and ostentatious art does, from the matter to the manner." It is picturesque,

because the true mind is observant as well as reflective, not because it deems a thought worth nothing unless when capped by a picture. Those who delight exclusively in the more elaborate and luscious diction of a later day may think it often inartistic; but its art consists in the skill with which the poet enhances the refined and the elevated by making them rise from the level of the simple." The imagination which belongs to this poem is not that which exhausts itself in glittering images, but that which moulds the various elements of a poem into a unity, and thus causes the impression which it leaves behind to be a total and masterful impression.

A critic remarks: "Those who appreciate the greatness of this poem will be in a position to give the right answer to the old question whether didactic poetry is a mistake. Moral teaching does not become poetry by being cut up into lengths and furnished with rhymes, but it may be made poetry if it is infused with passion and imagination. The 'Ode to Duty' is a great poem, not primarily because of the soundness of its philosophy, but because the poet has given to the abstract conception of Duty 'the consecration and the poet's dream,' and out of an abstraction has created 'a form more real than living man, Nursling of immortality.' But a poem artistically great might still—like some of Shelley's—be morally unsound—it is the soundness of its philosophy that makes the value of this ode for mankind."

Says Hudson: "If, as Emerson finely says, 'the great poets are judged by the frame of mind they induce,' the greatness of the writer of these superb verses is surely beyond question."

Ode. Intimations of Immortality

In an interesting note to Miss Fenwick the Poet says :
 " This was composed during my residence at Town-end, Grasmere. Two years at least passed between the writing of the first four stanzas (1803) and the remaining part (1806). To the attentive and competent reader the whole sufficiently explains itself : but there may be no harm in adverting here to particular feelings or experiences of my own mind on which the structure of the poem partly rests. Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being. I have said elsewhere :

" A simple child,
 That lightly draws its breath,
 And feels its life in every limb,
 What should it know of death ! "

But it was not so much from feelings of animal vivacity that my difficulty came as from a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within me. I used to brood over the stories of Enoch and Elijah, and almost to persuade myself that, whatever might become of others, I should be translated, in something of the same way to heaven. With a feeling congenial to this, I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. At that time I was afraid of such processes. In later periods of life I have deplored, as we have all reason to do, a subjugation of an opposite character, and have

rejoiced over the remembrances, as is expressed in the lines—obstinate questionings etc. To that dreamlike vividness and splendour which invests objects of sight in childhood, everyone, I believe, if he would look back, could bear testimony, and I need not dwell upon it here ; but having in the poem regarded it as presumptive evidence of a prior state of existence, I think it right to protest against a conclusion, which has given pain to some good and pious persons, that I meant to inculcate such a belief. It is far too shadowy a notion to be recommended to faith, as more than an element in our instincts of immortality. But let us bear in mind that, though the idea is not advanced in revelation, there is nothing there to contradict it, and the fall of man presents an analogy in its favour. Accordingly, a pre-existent state has entered into the popular creeds of many nations ; and among all people acquainted with classic literature, is known as an ingredient in Platonic philosophy. Archimedes said that he could move the world if he had a point whereon to rest his machine. Who has not felt the same aspirations as regards the world of his own mind ? Having to wield some of its elements when I was compelled to write this poem on the ' Immortality of the Soul,' I took hold of the notion of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorising me to make for my purpose the best use of it I could as a poet."

The Ode opens with a description of the Poet's childhood. There was a time, he says, referring to this early period, when the whole physical universe seemed clothed in celestial light, 'wearing the aspect of a vision or dream. But that time is no more. The dream has vanished.

However beautiful the earth and however fair the things may be, the Poet knows "there hath passed away a glory from the earth."

There came a time of grief. However, he was called away from it, and is now strong. He sympathises once more with nature's joy, and images of innocent pleasure rush crowding to his mind. A tree, or field, or flower reminds him, however, that the visionary gleam has vanished. There is a consciousness of something gone.

This feeling is accounted for. The soul exists prior to its connection with the body. We are come from God, and thus in infancy we bear in us most clearly the traces of our heavenly origin, traces which fade before advancing manhood. Human infancy is nearest to the Divine glory. The boy is further away from it; yet the light is with him, and he beholds its source. The youth is still farther removed; nevertheless, he is still the Priest of Nature, attended 'by the vision splendid.' Finally the man perceives its radiance "fade into the light of common day." This is an epitome of life.

Nevertheless, the earth has its own pleasures and yearnings. She tries, with good purpose, to make her foster child forget, not only the glories of his former home, but even the home itself. The child begins to adjust himself to his new surroundings. He is possessed of fancy and imagination, and endeavours to realise his own mental creations—to devise some plan "some fragment from his dream of human life"; to reproduce, after his own fashion, all phases of life, thus anticipating much of the actual experience which later years bring. But, why with such earnest pains should he provoke the years

to bring the inevitable yoke? And what, according to Wordsworth, is the power of the soul in these early years, and what the blessedness of its hours? His answer gives an insight into his psychology of childhood. The exterior semblance of the child belies his soul's immensity. The child is the best philosopher; who keeps his glorious heritage; who is the Eye among the blind. It is he who reads "the eternal deep," "haunted for ever by the eternal mind." He is the Prophet and Seer who intuits those profound and vital truths which men toil all their lives to find, lost in darkness—even the darkness of the grave. To the child immortality is an ever-present reality—brooding over him like the Day, a Master over a slave. Why, then, does he, so near to the radiant glory and truth of the past, look forward with the eye of imagination from the blessedness and freedom of these early years to a future when custom will lie upon him with a weight, 'heavy as frost and deep almost as life.'

The thought of these years of childhood breeds in the Poet 'perpetual benediction' and he raises the song of praise, not for the delight, freedom, and new-fledged hope which are so peculiar to these first years, but rather for the visionary dream which yields an ethereal world—for the trance that supplants the objective, corporeal world of sense with the subjective, unsubstantial and ideal world of soul—for those powerful intimations of a spiritual world behind the physical world; those recollections of a pre-natal day; those intuitions of truths; those visions of an Ideal, which, after all, is the truly Real.

But the fading of childhood's vision does not depress the Poet. Rather will he rejoice. He feels that the loss is

more than compensated by what remains behind, viz., by the intuitive sympathy between Man and Nature, by the 'soothing thoughts which spring' from the contemplation of human miseries, by the belief in the immortality of the soul, by 'the philosophic mind' brought on by the 'mel-lower year.'

Though the poet has grown older and lost the innocence of childhood, yet that innocence, that freedom, that delight, is all that he has lost. He still loves nature, being in deed now more attentive to her meaning, and more habitually under her spiritual influence than when he was a careless child, half-inattentive to her whisperings. His love for nature has been humanized by "hearing often times the still, sad music of humanity."

W. H. Hudson sums up Wordsworth's argument thus : "The soul of man is divine ; it comes into this earthly life, not a blank (as Lockian empiricism had asserted), but bringing with it high spiritual instinct and powers. But the interest of the mundane and the temporal encroach upon it ; and the divine instincts are stifled. We must strive, therefore, to keep these instincts alive ; to maintain the continuity of spiritual life ; to translate, into the reasoned convictions of manhood the child's innate and spontaneous faith. To do this we must live as much as possible among the deeper things of our own natures and in intimate communion with the divine soul of the universe. Then we shall rejoice that reminiscences of the distant past, faint and shadowy though they be, do in fact bear witness to the soul's divine origin and heritage and to its kinship to the 'eternal order of things.'"

"The Ode 'Intimations of Immortality' is a revealing document of the crisis in Wordsworth's spiritual history in the years 1802-6, as 'The Prelude' is of the crisis of 1793-97; and 'Tintern Abbey' of the lofty and solemn joy which followed." This Ode had remained for some years a fragment, ending at the close of the fourth stanza with a question :

'Whither is fled the visionary gleam?...'

During a part of those years Wordsworth was writing the account of his own recovery of imagination in the later books of 'The Prelude.' In that recovery the memory of his own childhood had played an important part, and his significance of childhood in the growth of mature manhood had found awestruck utterance :

"O mystery of man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours ! I am lost but see
In simple childhood something of the base
On which thy greatness stands."

Thus, in the Ode, after the break of years at the close of Stanza 4, he returns to his question in a mood of 'paradoxically sublime thought' about the child. Many of the slighter poems of Wordsworth have this thought as their root. He is thinking of it when he describes the characteristics of a child of three years, and dwells upon her utter gladness, her self-sufficingness, on the unexpectedness of her words and actions. For she has companions, he would say, that we know not of. She is living in a world that we cannot see, and acts from impulses derived from it of which we know nothing :

"Even so, this happy creature of herself
Is all-sufficient ; solitude to her

Is blithe society—who fills the air
 With gladness and involuntay songs
 Light are her sallies as the tripping fawn's
 Forth-startled from the fern where she lay couched,
 Unthought of, unexpected, as the stir
 Of the soft breeze ruffling the meadow-flowers,
 Or from before it chasing wantonly
 The many-coloured images imprest
 Upon the bosom of a placid lake."

In 'We are Seven' the child has no idea of any severance between earth and heaven; her dead brother and sister are still a part of the family; death is nothing to her knowledge; and she speaks, in saying, we are seven, one of those "truths which we are toiling all our lives to find," and the recollection of which, as felt by us when a child, is an intimation of our immortality.

In the 'Anecdote for Fathers,' Wordsworth questions his little son, as to the reason he should like one place more than another, and drives the boy at last into finding a reason in the existence of a Weather-cock in one place and not in the other. The boy had no real reason to give, and the father felt that he had forced the child to say what was untrue. But in the saying of it, he unconsciously, made Wordsworth conscious of the wrong he had done. He felt that he was reproved, as it were, by the God in the child; and the poem closes thus:

"O dearest, dearest boy, my heart
 For better love would seldom yearn,
 Could I but teach the hundredth part
 Of what from thee I learn."

Or the last lines of the sonnet composed by the seaside :

“ Dear child ! dear girl ! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine :
Thou liest in Abraham’s bosom all the year,
And worship’st at the Temple’s inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.”

The same thought appears in the little poem to Hartley Coleridge, then six years old :

“ O thou ! whose fancies from afar are brought,
Who of thy words dost make a mock apparel,
And fittest to unutterable thought
The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol ;
Thou faery voyager ! thou dost float
In such clear water that thy boat
May rather seem
To brood on air than on an earthly stream ;
Suspended in a stream as clear as sky,
Where earth and heaven do make one imagery ;
O blessed vision ! happy child !
Thou art so exquisitely wild,
I think of thee with many fears
For what may be thy lot in future years.”

And once more, in speaking of presentiments, he falls back also on this thought, and says :

“ The tear whose source I could not guess,
The deep sigh that seemed fatherless,
Were mine in early days.”

Wordsworth’s account of his childhood in ‘ The Prelude ’ suggests that he in fear and awe vaguely apprehended

powers about him vaster than his own. After the adventure on Ullswater with the borrowed boat, he says

" For many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being ; in my thoughts
There was a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion, no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields ;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day and were the trouble of my dreams."

"These lines," as Bradley has pointed out, "express a condition hardly to be distinguished from that which in the Ode Wordsworth gives thanks for as the peculiar privilege of childhood."

The controlling idea of this Ode is taken from Greek philosophy. Pythagoras, having made the soul's immortality consist in a succession of lives under various bodily shapes, explained knowledge as a recollection of what had been before experienced. Plato, investigating knowledge and finding in it certain elements not explainable from experience—what later philosophers have called innate ideas, or a prior condition of knowledge—adopted the Pythagorean theory, with this difference that he made the soul to have dwelt formerly in the supernal region of the pure idea, and so to have become imbued with the eternal and the real. Wordsworth perceiving in childhood an innocence—as Blake did—a sense as of a Paradise, as of heaven or earth, a living close to the true life, which every new experience of this world makes fainter explains

it as the reminiscence of a pre-natal existence in the presence of God. In Plato the doctrine of pre-existence and that of reminiscence are connected with immortality as the necessary fulfilment of the two former. We have been once in union with absolute life; we recall in many lives here on earth that past, and grow gradually into union with it; and at last having recalled it all through effort and conquest of the animal nature, we resume it again for ever.

Wordsworth draws from this doctrine a conclusion, a conclusion which Plato would not have drawn, that the child is nearer to God and to the vision of glory and loveliness than the man. Plato, on the contrary, would have made the grown philosopher more conscious of it than the child. But Wordsworth was really nothing of a Platonist; he only liked these ideas of pre-existence and reminiscence, and made his own thought out of them.

The doctrine of pre-existence which Wordsworth says he did not hold as a serious dogma appears elsewhere in his poetry. In 'The Prelude,' for instance, he says:

"Our childhood sits

Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne
That hath more power than all the elements.

I guess not what this tells of Being past,
Nor what it augurs of the life to come."

In 'The Excursion' he virtually affirms the doctrine. He asks:

"Ah! Why in age

Do we revert so fondly in the walks
Of childhood—but that there the Soul discerns
The dear memorial footsteps—unimpaired
Of her own native rigour; thence can hear

Reverberations ; and choral song,
 Commingling with the incense that ascends,
 Undaunted, toward the imperishable heavens,
 From her own lonely altar ?”

Leslie stephen remarks that the magic of the Ode is due to Wordsworth's recognition of the mysterious efficacy of our childish instincts. He gives emphasis to one of the most striking facts of our spiritual experience, which had passed psychologists. He feels what they afterwards tried to explain. “Some modern reasoners would explain its significance by reference to a very different kind of pre-existence. The instincts, they would say, are valuable, because they register the accumulated and inherited experience of past generations. Wordsworth's delight in wild scenery is regarded by them as due to the ‘combination of states that were organised in the race during barbarous times when the pleasurable activities were amongst the mountains, woods and waters.’ In childhood we are most completely under the dominion of these inherited impulses. The correlation between the organism and its medium is then most perfect, and hence the peculiar theme of childish communion with nature. Wordsworth would have repudiated the doctrine with disgust. He would have been ‘on the sides of the angels.’ No memories of the savage and the monkey, but the reminiscences of the once glorious soul could explain his emotions. Yet there is much in common between him and the men of science whom he denounced with too little discrimination. The fact of the value of these primitive instincts is admitted, and admitted for the same purpose. Man, it is agreed, is furnished with sentiment which cannot be ex-

plained as the result of his individual experience. They may be intelligible, according to the evolutionist, when regarded as embodying the past experience of the race; or according to Wordsworth, as implying a certain mysterious faculty imprinted upon the soul. The scientific doctrine, whether sound or not, has modified the whole mode of approaching ethical problem, and Wordsworth, though with a very different purpose gives a new emphasis to the facts upon a recognition of which, according to some theorists, must be used the reconciliation of the great Rival schools—the intuitionists and the utilitarians."

In the IX section of the Ode we have a revelation concerning the nature of being—an idealistic view of Reality—and also a revelation with respect to knowledge—that the knowledge of the child consists largely of 'shadowy recollections' of a previous state of existence.

Wordsworth was no doubt familiar with Plato's teachings on this point but the roots of his conviction seem to have been imbedded in the subsoil of his trance-experiences of childhood, which gave him the consciousness of a world above, and more real than the natural world of sense. Tennyson tells us that both pre-existence and immortality were present to consciousness in his trance-experiences as indubitable realities.

There is a similarity of thought in Vaughan's "The Retreat" and Wordsworth's Ode, and it has been asked whether Wordsworth may not have been partly inspired by that seventeenth-century mystical poet. Here is Vaughan's poem:

"Happy those early days, when I
Shin'd in my angell-infancy!

Before I understood this place
 Appointed for my second race
 Or taught my soul to fancy aught
 But a white, celestiall thought ;
 When yet I had not walkt above
 A mile or two from my first love,
 And looking back, at that short space,
 Could see a glimpse of his bright face ;
 When on some gilded cloud or flowre
 My gazing soul would dwell on houre,
 And in those weaker glories spy
 Some shadows of eternity :
 Before I taught my tongue to wound
 My conscience with a sinfull sound,
 Or had the black art to dispence
 A sev'rall sinne to ev'ry sence,
 But felt through all this fleshly drosse
 Bright shoots of ever lastingnesse.

O how I long to travel back,
 And tread again that ancient track !
 That I might once mor reach that plaine,
 When first I left my glorious traine ;
 From whence th' inlightened spirit sees
 That shady city of palm-trees
 But ah ! my soul with too much stay
 Is drunk, and staggers in the way !
 Some men a forward motion love,
 But I by backward steps would move ;
 And when this dust falls to the urn,
 In that state I came—return."

Both express apparent belief in the pre-existent state, and

in the nearness of childhood to it ; that we get further away from its glory as we grow older ; that certain things in this life give us hints of the previous life. Both clearly bring out the sense of immortality present in the vivid feelings of childhood ; though perhaps more penetratingly by Vaughan. But Vaughan's poem differs from Wordsworth's Ode in several respects. While Vaughan's poem is a poem of regret, and the only relief, he expects from the sorrows and sins which beset his life is in death which will bring him back to ' That shady city of palm-trees,' Wordsworth bases his hopes in this life upon the process " by which our early intuitions are to be transformed in later life into settled principles of feeling and action." Secondly, while Wordsworth attributes the fading of ' The vision splendid ' to the chains of custom lying upon his soul, Vaughan traces this fact to a moral cause viz., " His teaching his tongue to wound, his conscience with a sinful sound." Thirdly, Vaughan's thought that hereafter in the perfected Christian manhood the child's heart will reappear is absent in the Ode.

In some respects—in the description of the world as it appears to the child mind, in views on pre-existence and views concerning changes that take place in the child's view of Nature as he advances in age, the Ode resembles Traherne's poem " Wonder."

Sneath says : " These views are the common property of mystical poets, and, in default of positive external evidence, it is the mark of wisdom not to impose on Wordsworth an obligation to one or more of the seventeenth century poets which he may not owe." Aubrey de Vere remarks : " If its philosophy had been based on argument,

not on personal recollections, the poem, in losing its passion, would have lost its authenticity; and its author would have seemed to expound a system, not to bear a witness. It is his own faith which enkindles that of his readers; and his own rests upon experiences gone by but precious still."

This Ode after ascending most freely above 'this visible diurnal round' returns to human things, ending like the 'Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle,' in a tranquillity which 'retains but a ripple of the storm beyond the harbour.' In the words of a famous critic, the close of this sublime Ode restores to the reader's mind that repose which is needful after the soarings and sinkings of the strain. It closes, as it opened, on a grave and majestic note, but while the opening was near to a cry of desolation, the close is near to a hymn of praise. The chorus of Nature once so full of thing, is eloquent as ever, but its eloquence, if less poignant, is now richer because it reverberates through all the avenues of heart and mind:

"The innocent brightness of a new-born Day

Is lovely yet;

The clouds that gather round the setting sun

Do take a sober colouring from the eye

That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;

Another race hath been, and other palms are won."

Nature, besides her diviner gleams, seldom revealed, has her human side, and that alone might well suffice for brief parenthesis of moral life. The 'glory of the flower,' the splendour of the grass have faded, but they are now fraught with a richer, more spiritual beauty and power; for they are linked with the affections and emotions, with

the life not of Nature only but of men. We see them with that finer sense which hears the sad music of humanity interfused through the beauty of the visible scene. Hence, far from grieving, we can 'find strength' i. e., compensation, not merely consolation, in what remains behind. As Herford remarks: "The 'Vision' itself was gone past recall. But two persuasions, routed perhaps in the same instinct, impelled him to believe that the essential virtue of it was still within his reach. One was his conviction that mature manhood can and does draw support from experiences of childhood, themselves perhaps utterly forgotten and overlaid :

"For feeling comes in aid
Of feeling, and diversity of strength
Attends us if but once we have been strong."

The other was his, equally abnormal, doctrine that poetry is 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'...As the man can enrich his mature strength by recurring to those 'spots of time,' full of vivifying virtue in his past, or by happening to come into a situation which recalled them, so the memory of our visionary childhood, recalled to a consciousness charged with the fuller experience and riper affections of maturity, may generate a mood greater and more potent than either this experience or those visions in themselves, for they communicate to the experience those 'intimations of infinity' which attached to the child's imagination, even though the child's outlook on the whole be vanished past recall."

It is a lawless rhymed Ode. The basis is the heroic line but it is interspersed with shorter and blither measures, varying from eight syllables down to three, "which are

received by the ear at first with joyful surprise and then with as joyful an expectancy, but which do not drown the solemn fundamental march of the composition." Every one of these interludes is not successful, as for instance, this :

"Land and sea
Give themselves up to jollity,
And with the heart of May
Doth every beast keep holiday ;
Thou child of joy,
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy
Shepherd-boy !"

and this :

"Ye blessed Creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make ; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee ;
My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal,
The fullness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all.
O evil day ! If I were sullen
While Earth herself is adorning
This sweet May-morning ;
And the children are culling
On every side."

These have, in Elton's words, something of a false gallop and even false rhymes ; jollity, holiday, sullen, culling.

Elton says : ' But Shelley could not have bettered, if he often equals, the allegro of ' The Rainbow comes and goes,' with its sudden long-drawn fall into disenchantment. And in the ninth verse, ' O joy ! that in our embers,' there is an interweaving of solemn with gayer paces, which

shows Wordsworth's utmost reach in the expression of contrasted emotion; while even in the seventh 'Behold the child' which is purposely at a lower pitch and in a playful strain, there is no fault if we consider its purpose. And the conduct of the whole, with its sober close as of a splendid evening, give at least as high a pleasure as the language. It is Wordsworth's single but supreme triumph in the highest kind of lyrical architecture.'

Watts-Dunton's reproach against this Ode is that the length of lines and rhyme arrangement are not inevitable. Whether forced or inevitable, they faithfully echo corresponding changes in the sentiments of the poem. A critic says: "That poem is in one sense a troubled poem, while in another its yearnings are ever after rest, and remind one of the description of the ocean in Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound"—'I hear the mighty deep hungering for calm.'

The diction is felicitous. Parts of it are written in that 'large utterance, at once majestic and simple—which are the best portion of Wordsworth's poetry. Parts of it are familiar even to roughness. Says Aubrey de Vere. "Without such passages the sentiment of this Ode would have lacked its passionate impulse, and its doctrine would have been frozen into a scholastic theory. In this poem many extremes are reconciled. In no other has Wordsworth's genius, contemplative at once and emotional, moved through so wide an arc." So also Elton: "In this Ode the author's gifts for lyrical and for metaphysical verse become perfect, and are for once united."

This Ode is studded thick with expressions of marvellous beauty in workmanship and of deep pregnancy in

thought-expressions which haunt the mind ever afterwards. The line 'Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,' has, in Saintsbury's phrase, the 'auroral light of true poetry' about it. The line 'The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep' has, like 'The sounding cataract haunted me like a passion,' the echoing detonation of true poetry. The line 'And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore' has the surge and sweep of great poetry. And so on.

The Nightingale

In this poem Wordsworth compares the nightingale and the stock-dove. He expresses his liking for the 'homely tale' of the dove, singing 'serious faith and inward glee,' in preference to the 'fierce' and 'tumultuous' song of the nightingale, and thus illustrates with half-conscious allegory (as Myers remarks) the contrast between himself and certain other poets. As opposed to some other poets who are impulsive and passionate, we usually conceive of Wordsworth as the embodiment of mild wisdom and gentle precept. For Wordsworth who tells us that the gods demand the depth and not the tumult of the soul, the right singer is the brooding stock-dove, whose voice is

'buried among trees

Yet to be come at by the breeze.'

"His voice was buried among trees," says Wordsworth: "a metaphor expressing the love of seclusion by which this bird is marked; and characterizing its note as not partaking of the shrill and the piercing, and therefore more easily deadened by the intervening shade; yet a note so peculiar, and withal so pleasing, that the breeze,

gifted with love of the sound which the poet feels, penetrates the shade in which it is entombed, and conveys it to the ear of the listener."

The Mountain Echo

In this poem Wordsworth hears the mountain echo giving back the shouts of the cuckoo, and straightway thinks of the reverberations and intelligences that come to us from an unknown source :

"Such rebounds our inward ear
Catches sometimes from afar—
Listen, ponder, hold them dear ;
For of God—of God they are."

Wordsworth here draws a comparison between the echo of a sensible sound and spiritual presentiment felt by the mind. This poem allegorises Wordsworth's philosophy that man has a higher nature as well as a lower—one of which is from above, and the other lies below, and it is for man to select whether he will live a spiritual life or content himself with its mere animal counterpart.

The thought which these simple, yet pregnant lines embody has been more elaborately stated in Book IV of "The Excursion" :

"I have seen
A curious child, who dwelt upon a contract
Of inland ground, applying to his ear
The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell ;
To which, in silence hushed, his very soul
Listened intently ; and his countenance soon
Brightened with joy ; for from within were heard
Murmurings, whereby the monitor expressed
Mysterious union with its native sea.

Even such a shell the universe itself
 Is to the ear of Faith ; and there are times,
 I doubt not, when to you it doth impart
 Authentic tidings of invisible things ;
 Of ebb and flow, and ever-during power ;
 And central peace, subsisting at the heart
 Of endless agitation. Here you stand,
 Adore, and worship when you know it not ;
 Pious beyond the intention of your thought ;
 Devout above the meaning of your will."

The Daffodils

It was written in 1807. The origin of the poem is evidently connected with a visit to Gowbarrow park. Dorothy Wordsworth says : " When we were there, we saw a few daffodils close to the water side. We fancied that the sea had floated the seeds ashore and that the little colony had so sprung up. But as we went along there were more and yet more, and at last, under the boughs of the trees we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones, as on a pillow for weariness, and the rest tossed and reeled and danced and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew upon them over the lake. They looked so gay, ever glancing, ever changing...There was here and there a little knot, and a few stragglers higher up ; but they were so few as not to disturb the simplicity, unity and life of that one busy highway. We rested again and again. The bays were stormy, and we heard the waves at different distances, and in the middle of the water, like the sea." The two lines

"They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude "

were contributed by Mrs. Wordsworth ; and Wordsworth, in a letter to Wrangham, said that they 'if thoroughly felt would annihilate nine-tenths of the reviews of the kingdom.'

Wordsworth's own note on this poem is : " The subject of these stanzas [on the joyous wind-tossed daffodils nodding their golden heads beside the dancing and foaming waves of Ullswater] is rather an elementary feeling and simple impression (approaching to the nature of an ocular spectrum upon the imaginative faculty than an exertion of it)."

In the first stanza the poet sees daffodils. The first two lines

'I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills '

are intimately Wordsworthian. They show his love of things lonely. The simile is very appropriate because Wordsworth is here describing his wanderings amongst the hills of the Lake District the atmosphere of which is seldom cloudless even in the finest weather. Byron borrows the imagery in ' The Prisoner of Chillon ':

"Lone, as a solitary cloud
A single cloud on a sunny day,
While all the rest of heaven is clear,
A frown upon the atmosphere,
That hath no business to appear
When skies are blue, and earth is gay."

There follows in the next two stanzas a fanciful description of the host of daffodils. These lines illustrate

Wordsworth's normal method—which is to paint neither the detached feature nor the graduated landscape with its harmonised distances, receding each behind each, but to paint *the scene*, and the soul of that scene. In this poem the description includes but the margin of a bay and the long galaxy of daffodils that “outdid the sparkling waves in glee”; and anything more of detail would have destroyed that singleness of effect with which the general character of the scene is set forth. Wordsworth passes by, as irrelevant, multitudes of objects with which other poets have enriched their pages—poets like Scott, for instance. The lines

‘Ten thousand saw I at a glance

Tossing their heads in sprightly dance’

illustrate another element in the life of Nature which filled the poetry of Wordsworth, namely, the intercommunion of all things in Nature with one another. To Wordsworth an infinite love flows through the universe; the world is a world of active friendship, where everything is speaking in sweet communion. Hence the daffodils dance together. The next lines

“The waves beside them danced; but they

Out-did the sparkling waves in glee,

A poet could not but be gay,

In such a jocund company”

illustrate another characteristic that Wordsworth saw in the life of Nature, namely, its joy which, in turn awakened joy in him. The sight of the daffodils fills him with the spirit of gaiety, and they live in his mind and heart, a joyful memory. Wordsworth was not incapable of taking a simple, irresponsible joy in things. If the primrose by

the river's brim was for him the symbol and index of things divine, it did not therefore cease to be a primrose. The spiritual meaning was added to the natural beauty, not substituted for it. This poem is an expression of pure delight in such natural beauty.

But when the daffodils are out of sight, they are not, therefore, out of mind. They live on in memory, to be 'recollected in tranquillity':

"They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude."

Coleridge condemned these lines in the 'Biographia Literaria' on the ground that the expression 'inward eye' should be reserved for higher uses, for purely mental or spiritual delight. It is to be noted, however, that Blake used this expression in a similar sense:

"What to others a trifle appears
Fills me full of smiles or tears;
For double the vision my eyes do see,
And a double vision is always with me.
With my *inward eye* 'tis on old man grey:
With my outward, a thistle across my way."

With the sentiment expressed, contrast Keats'

"But were there ever any
Writhed not at passed joy?"

and compare Montgomery's

"Bliss in possession will not last
Remembered joys are never past:
At once the fountain, stream and sea,
They were—they are—they yet shall be."

Hutton remarks: "The great beauty of that poem is its wonderful buoyancy, its purely objective way of

conveying that buoyancy, and the extraordinary vividness with which 'the lonely rapture of lonely minds' is stamped upon the whole poem."

Laodamia

This poem was composed in 1814. Wordsworth was at that time educating his eldest son and this led him to a careful re-reading of some of the Latin writers, notably Virgil. 'Laodamia' is a result of the new inspiration—that of classic story—that thus came into his work. It was written with Virgilian labour and Wordsworth himself asserted that it took him more trouble than 'almost anything of equal length' he had ever written.

'Laodamia' has been written in classical style. Its diction is remarkably chaste, its manner stately, its form antique. It moves slowly and with dignity. It is surprising how Wordsworth chose to adopt a form that was not usual with him and how he succeeded in giving to it all the satisfying perfection of shape and all the marmorean stateliness which belongs to antiquity. An intensive study of Virgil was partly responsible for this and partly the fact that of late another strain in Wordsworth's genius had begun to assert itself. As Arnold says: "He was too conversant with Milton not to catch at times his master's manner," and here in this poem, as in 'The Affliction of Margaret' and in some passages of 'The Excursion,' he catches it. The very opening is Miltonic :

'With sacrifice before the rising morn.'

The second stanza is in the manner of Pope's 'Iliad' :

'So speaking, and by fervent love endowed
With faith, the suppliant heavenward lifts her hands;
While, like the sun emerging from a cloud,

Her countenance brightens—and her eye expands ;
 Her bosom heaves and spreads, her stature grows ;
 And she expects the issue in repose.'

Herford says : ' But, with all its nobility and beauty, it is touched, as Wordsworth's writing so rarely is, with an air of artifice, almost of a *tour de force*. He is telling a classical story in a style reminiscent now of Milton, now of the once-disdained English Augustans ; not, like William Morris in later days, translating it into an idiom entirely his own.'

Laodamia implores gods to restore ' Her Hero slain upon the beach of Troy ' to her sight. She is rewarded for her fidelity, and Protesilaus appears. He brings back from the abode of the Departed a loftier spirit than any pagan poet attributed to the ' strengthless Heads.' He makes no lament for the lost pride or pleasures of man's life :

' Earth destroys

These raptures duly—Erebus disdains :

Cal'm pleasures there abide—majestic pains.'

Laodamia cannot believe that the husband restored to her through the force of her intercession, is indeed to tarry with her but three hours' space :

' The gods to us are merciful, and they

Yet further may relent ; for mightier far

Than strength of nerve or sinew, or the sway

Of magic, potent over sun and star

Is love, though oft to agony distress'd,

And though his favourite seat be feeble woman's
 breast.'

With Protesilaus human love remains, but its weakness

belongs to it no more. He had died for his country, and all is well :

‘ Love was given,
Encouraged, sanctioned, chiefly for that end ;
For this the passion to excess was driven—
That self might be annulled, her bondage prove
The fetters of a dream, opposed to love.’

He tells her of worlds whose course is equable and pure, where there are no fears to beat away, no strife to heal and where the past is unsighed for, and the future sure. He tells her

‘ Of all that is most beauteous, imaged there
In happier beauty ; more pellucid streams,
An ampler ether, a diviner air,
And fields invested with purpureal gleams.’

It is in vain ; she cannot bring herself to consent to the divine will, and she dies. She has to wear out her penance time :

‘ Apart from happy ghosts who gather flowers
Of blissful quiet ’mid unfading bowers.’

The warning of Protesilaus to his wife who would be ‘ a second time his bride ’

‘ Be taught, O faithful consort, to control
Rebellious passion ; for the Gods approve
The depth, and not the tumult of the soul.
A fervent, not ungovernable love’

embodies a favourite doctrine of Wordsworth. The Wanderer in ‘ The Excursion,’ checking the poet’s outspoken grief after hearing the story of Margaret says :

‘ Enough to sorrow you have given,
The purposes of Wisdom ask no more.’

In 'Vandracour and Julia' Wordsworth describes how the world was transformed for Vandracour in the rapture of his love only to value it as

'An earnest given

By ready nature for a life of love,

For endless constancy, and placid truth.'

Not that Wordsworth held love to be a weak passion. Rather, as Raleigh says, he held it to be too strong and disorderly, too little intellectual in its quickening power, to be trusted as an illuminant. It is an expression of the stoical or Christian fortitude in which Wordsworth's faith found support after disillusionment. Yet as Legouis remarks, the Olympian serenity advocated in this poem makes us feel—and painfully feel—the distance between the summit where gods dwell and the lower ground inhabited by men. 'Laodamia dies of a broken heart, and it seems hard that she should be punished for it as for meditated suicide. Is this the conclusion of optimism? How hard, inhuman and, one might add, despairing! The poem is great and 'pathetic, because Wordsworth, all the time, sympathises with Laodamia, feels for her tender weakness, is at heart more like her than like the heroic, dis-humanised Protesilaus. But it can scarcely be called a comforting poem.' F. W. H. Myers remarks: "Wordsworth was enabled to depict his own love *in excelsis*, to imagine what aspect it might have worn, if it had been its destiny to deny itself at some heroic call, and to confront with nobleness an extreme emergency, and to be victor in an olympian contest of the soul. For, indeed, the 'fervent, not ungovernable love,' which is the ideal that Protesilaus is sent to teach, is 'on a great scale the same affection

which we have been considering in domesticity and peace ; it is love considered not as a revolution but as a consummation ; as a self-abandonment not to a laxer but to a sterner law : no longer as an invasive passion, but as the deliberate habit of the soul. It is that conception of love which springs into being in the last canto of Dante's 'Purgatory,'—which finds in English chivalry a noble voice :

'I could not love thee, dear, so much,

Loved I not honour more.'

For, indeed, even as Plato says that Beauty is the splendour of Truth, so such a Love as this is the splendour of Virtue ; it is the unexpected spark that flashes from self-forgetful soul to soul, it is man's standing evidence that he ' must lose himself to find himself,' and that only when the veil of his personality has lifted from around him can he recognize that he is already in heaven."

This poem not only imitates and appropriates the classical : it recreates and elevates it. The antique form has been successfully coalesced with the modern spirit and subordinated, without doing any violence to it, to a universal Moral Truth and an universal Spiritual Beauty. Hazlitt says that it " breathes the pure spirit of the finest fragments of antiquity the sweetness, the gravity, the strength, the beauty and the langour of death—' calm contemplation and majestic pains.' Its glossy brilliancy arises from the perfection of the finishing, like that of a careful sculpture, not from gaudy colouring. The texture of the thoughts has the smoothness and solidity of marble. It is a poem that might be read aloud in Elysium, and the spirits of departed heroes and sages would gather round to listen to it ! "

Yarrow Visited

In 1814 Wordsworth, under the guidance of James Hogg, "the Ettrick Shepherd," visits Yarrow and continues 'Yarrow Unvisited (1803).' The feeling in 1803 was :

'We have a vision of our own
Ah ! Why should we undo it ?'

Now it is :

'And is this—Yarrow ?—This the stream
Of which my fancy cherish'd
So faithfully, a waking dream,
An image that hath perish'd ?'

There suddenly falls a fit of gloom on the poet's heart, and he would that some minstrel were near, to dispel it with glad music. Yet why should he be sad ? The stream wanders in its way clear and silvery ; the eyes are being soothed by green hills ; Saint Mary's Lake is 'visibly delighted.' And a blue sky bends o'er Yarrow Vale save where it is flocked by 'pearly whiteness' of a fair September morning. Everything that meets his eye is beautiful and soothing. But the braes, though beautiful, look so solitary and desolate, and the solitariness of the present answers too well to the sadness of the past. The poet longs to pierce into the dumb past and know something of the pathetic histories that have immortalised these braes. He describes the present sentiment that pervades Yarrow :

"Meek loveliness is around thee spread
A softness still and holy ;
The grace of forest charms decayed,
And pastoral melancholy."

The verses which follow relapse from that attitude into a more ordinary level of description. Having traversed the

stream from St. Mary's Loch to Newark and Bowtrill, he leaves it with the impression that sight has not destroyed imagination :

"I see—but not by sight alone,
The treasured dreams of times long past,
We'll keep them, winsome Marrow!
For, when we are there, although 'tis fair.
'Twill be another Yarrow!"

We recall that Wordsworth as a boy, on his first view of Mont Blanc, from the Col de Balme, felt only grief :

"To have a soulless image on the eye
Which has usurp'd upon a living thought
That never more could be."

(*Prelude* VI)

The poet fears to see the Yarrow, lest the dream of years might be dispelled, and asks whether the imaginative anticipation may not in itself be a richer wealth than any reality which could take its place.

The poem is written in the manner of the old ballad, with playful touches of dialect and also with an infusion of modern reflection, which yet does not spoil its naturalness. The second and the fourth lines in each stanza end in double rhymes so that the refrain falls full on the fine melodious name of Yarrow. Shairp says: "It plays with the subject, rises and falls—now light-heart, now serious, then back to homeliness with a most graceful movement. It has in it something of that ethereality of thought and manner which belonged to Wordsworth's earlier lyrics—which is a thing to feel rather than to describe—left him after about 1805, and though replaced in the best of his later poems by increased depth and mellowness

of reflection, yet could no more be compensated than the fresh gleam of new-fledged leaves in spring could be made up for by their autumnal glory."

The verses in which he depreciates Yarrow are swift and bare and rapid. Hutton remarks: 'And the style corresponds to the thought; it is the style of one who exults in holding over and being strong and buoyant enough to hold over, a promised imaginative joy. A certain ascetic radiance—if the paradox be permissible—a manly jubilation in being rich enough to sacrifice an expected delight, makes the style sinewy, rapid, youthful, and yet careful in its youthfulness, as jealous of redundancy as it is firm and elastic.'

Elegiac Stanzas

This poem was written on the occasion of the death of his brother Captain John Wordsworth who was drowned while on duty on board the "Abergavenny," East India-man, which was wrecked off Portland, Feb. 5, 1815. "For myself," Wordsworth wrote in that hour of darkness, "I feel there is something cut out of my life which cannot be restored. I never thought of him but with hope and delight. We looked forward to the time, not distant, as we thought, when he would settle near us—when the task of his life would be over, and he would have nothing to do but reap his reward. By that time I hoped also that the chief part of my labours would be executed, and that I should be able to show him that he had not placed a false confidence in me. I never wrote a line without a thought of giving him pleasure; my writing, printed and manuscript, were his delight, and one of the chief solaces of his long voyages." He continues: "I will not be cast

down; even if only for his sake I will not be dejected. I have much yet to do, and pray God to give me strength and power: his part of the agreement between us is brought to an end, mine remains; and I hope when I shall be able to think of him with a calmer mind, that the remembrance of him dead will even animate me more than the joy which I had in him living." This is the "deep distress," which, he tells us "humanised" his soul.

The Sir George Beaumont, to whom the poem introduces us, was a wealthy connoisseur whose friendship, as Mr. Myers has said, formed for many years the poet's "closest link with the world of culture and art." He was not a great painter; but the genuine feeling for nature shown in his landscapes made a strong appeal to Wordsworth's sympathies.

The poem opens with a description of Peele Castle as the poet saw it during a summer month which he spent in its neighbourhood. Had he painted it then, he would have painted it thus—Nature, not as in Beaumont's picture 'in anger,' but visibly benign, not threatening Man with ruin, but clothed in Beauty as for her bridal with his soul. And he would have added

".....the gleam,

The light that never was, on sea or shore

The consecration and the Poet's dream."

For fear of these lines being misunderstood, Wordsworth altered them thus in the edition of 1820 :

".....a gleam

Of lustre, known to neither sea nor land,

But borrowed from the youthful Poet's dream."

But now a change has come. Under the chastening influence of grief his soul has been awakened to the stern realities of human life and he has learned to appreciate the picture of the stormy sea, the sinking hull and all that 'pageantry of fear' amidst which Peele Castle has been placed by Beaumont, begirt with its stubborn stone walls which proudly defy the rage of the mind and the onset of the waves. Wordsworth renounces that aspiration after a Nature harmoniously accordant with the dreams of a poet-recluse. He pities that blind happiness, which nourishes itself on its own false fancies. He covets the happiness of fearless vision, "and frequent sights of what is to be borne." It is by the daylight of truth, not by "the light that never was, on sea or land," that the poet desires to look upon the things of earth. He welcomes the lessons of fortitude and patience which are to be derived from frequent sights of human sufferings, and can face a life-long grief without flinching :

"This, which I know, I speak with mind serene."

The pathos of this poem is far deeper because the sorrow is not that sorrow which, in its feebleness or its spleen, rejects hope :

"Not without hope we suffer and we mourn."

According to Leslie Stephen, this poem expresses the futility of idle grief. Wordsworth sees that ordinarily sorrow tends to produce bitterness or effminacy of character but that, if rightly used, it may serve only to detach us from the lower motive and give sanctity to the higher. "The mind in which the most valuable elements have been systematically strengthened by meditations, by association of deep thought with the most universal

presences, by constant sympathy with the joys and sorrows of it fellows, will be prepared to convert sorrow into a medicine instead of a poison, sorrow is deteriorating so far as it is selfish. The man who is occupied with his own interests makes grief an excuse for effeminate indulgence in self-pity. He becomes weaker and more fretful. The man who has learnt habitually to think of himself as part of a greater whole, whose conduct has been habitually directed to noble ends, is purified and strengthened by the spiritual convulsion. His disappointment, or his loss of some beloved object, makes him more anxious to fix the bases of his happiness widely and deeply, and to be content with the consciousness of honest work, instead of looking for what is called success."

(Leslie Stephen)

Wordsworth uses human sorrow as an influence to stir up his own meditative spirit, till it loses its own nature and becomes

"Sorrow that is not sorrow, but delight ;
And miserable love, that is not pain
To hear of, for the glory that redounds
Therefrom to human kind and what we are."

This poem is "classical both in conception and execution—in the subdued restraint of its deep and smouldering emotion as also in the style, carved as in marble and adamant." The lines

"The light that never was on sea or land
The consecration, and the Poet's dream"

are some of the most beautiful lines that Wordsworth has ever written. They express the essential function of the

artist—which is to add that magic touch of beauty that never dwells in the mere outside.

In this poem, remarks Herford, the Wordsworth of 'The Happy Warrior' confronts the Wordsworth of 'Tintern Abbey.'

Evening Ode

In this poem of 1818 we have "our last glimpse of Wordsworth in the full and peculiar power of his genius." The stimulus was afforded by a sight seen from the Rydal Mount of sunset among the cumbrian hills. Wordsworth sees the wonderful effulgence of the sun setting over hills, the silent spectacle of glory and radiance on the earth below ; and he is swept beyond the earthly beauty to aspire to the heavenly—nay, half of the beauty is itself of heaven, out of the heart of the perfect life :

"Thine is the tranquil hour, purpureal Eve !
But long as godlike wish, or hope divine,
Informs my spirit : ne'er can I believe
That this magnificence is wholly thine ;
From worlds not quickened by the Sun
A portion of the gift is won."

Wordsworth reproduces with magical simplicity as it were the inmost virtue of natural phenomena :

"No sound is uttered,—but a deep
And solemn harmony pervades
The hollow vale from steep to steep,
And penetrates the glades.
Far-distant images draw nigh,
Called forth by wondrous potency
Of beamy radiance, that imbues
What e'er it strikes with gem-like hues !

In vision exquisitely clear,
 Herds range along the mountain side ;
 And glistening antlers are descried ;
 And gilded flocks appear...."

A critic remarks : " This is man's sempiternal homage to Nature ; and the language, though magnificent, is that of the common heart, unjewelled, unfermented, unspoilt by egotisms. It is the language of great poetry—a poetry which continually reminds us that Man, who knew not how to live in Eden, has still to learn to live outside it. Its subject is that core of peace and worship, within each of us, around which all our passions and struggles whirl." This description is an instance of the fact that " Wordsworth went to Nature, not to decorate his thoughts, but to find them." He went, not to make literary patterns, but to "see into the life of things." His closest descriptions are suffused with meditation and wistfulness.

The mountain ridges seem a golden ladder, on which one might ascend to heaven ; "wings at my shoulders begin to play"—the very Platonic expression—he calls drooping old men to come forth, and see to what fair countries they are bound ; he bids the genii wake the traveller that he may meet the dower God gives him in such beauty. In the lines

"Wings at my shoulder seem to play ;
 But, rooted here, I stand and gaze
 On those bright steps, that heavenward raise
 Their practicable way"

Wordsworth brings home to us the sense of his being
 'true to the kindred points of heaven and home.'

In the last passage, Wordsworth speaks with gratitude of those rare moments in which he seemed to have recovered something of the old vision and prays that his old age may keep to its latest breath those visions of the soul, those dreams of an immortal life ; that he may rejoice, with quickened spirit, in the admonitions of God's voice given in the quiet of his heart, or suddenly flashing on him from Nature. The poem ends—with a deep personal pathos—in an allusion to the light which “lay about him in his infancy,”—the light

“ Full early lost, and fruitlessly deplored ;
Which, at this moment, on my waking sight
Appears to shine, by miracle restored ;
My soul, though yet confined to earth,
Rejoices in a second birth !
—'Tis past, the visionary splendour fades ;
And night approaches with her shades.”

Myers remarks : “ For those to whom the mission of Wordsworth appears before all things as a religious one there is something solemn in the spectacle of the seer standing at the close of his own apocalypse, with the consciousness that the stiffening brain would never permit him to drink again that over-flowing sense of glory and revelation ; never, till he should drink it new in the kingdom of God.” He lived, in fact, through another generation of men, but the vision came to him no more :

“ Or if some vestige of those gleams
Survived, 'twas only in his dreams.”

This poem has not the magic of Wordsworth's old imaginative speech. Herford says : “ The trappings of pietistic

phrase to which he has recourse, however, consolatory to the theologian, only betray the poverty of the poet."

To the Skylark

This poem was written in 1825. According to Turner, Wordsworth's poem shows traces of reminiscence of Shelley's poem composed in 1820.

It is an excellent example of Wordsworth's faithfulness to real life. The salient characteristics of the Skylark mentioned in this poem are as follows. It soars to the clouds and sings on high. Its nest is on the ground. Its wings quiver. It stops singing as soon as it composes its wings to drop into its nest. It sometimes soars to the last point of vision. Its song is prompted by its love for its mate and young ones. Its song is independent of spring. It sings, unlike the nightingale, in "a privacy of glorious light." The poem ends with a couplet in which the bird is regarded as a type of the "wise who soar but never roam—true to the kindred points of heaven and home."

Each stanza consists of a quatrain and a couplet. The rhythm is iambic.

The second stanza has been omitted in most editions of the poet's work, for the poet himself transferred it to another poem entitled 'A morning Exercise.'

R H. Hutton has contrasted Shelley's 'Skylark' with Wordsworth's 'Skylark'. He writes : "Shelley's 'Skylark' is a symbol of illimitable thirst drinking in illimitable sweetness,—an image of that rapture which no man can ever reach because it soars so far from earth, because it is ever rising with unflagging wing, despising old delights, Shelley will not recognise its earthly form or

abode at all, it is not a bird whose nest is on the ground. It is a winged desire, always rising, aspiring, singing, "Like an unbodied joy, whose race is just begun" :

"Hail to thee, blithe spirit,—

Thou dost float and run,

Like an unbodied joy, whose race is just begun."

Yet even this symbol of a thirst ever new, and ever seeking to be slaked from sweet fountains, throws him into utter dejections before this most marvellous of English lyrics closes: "We look before and after" etc. How strong is the contrast with Wordsworth's 'Skylark'! Shelley's is by far the more wonderful poem, for the quick pulses of his panting measures seem to give us the very beats of those quivering limbs while Wordsworth's stately lines are obviously the expression of the thought of a meditative watcher. But while Shelley has ignored the earth and the real bird altogether in his ideal flight, the firm grasp of Wordsworth's thought gives the green earth her due share in the ethereal minstrel's rapture, and bids us observe, that it is not the distance from earth, but the nearness to it, which inspires the celestial :

"To the last point of vision and beyond....."

It was Wordsworth's lifelong faith that fidelity to the 'kindred points of heaven and home' made both earth the more joyous, and heaven the more sublime. Shelley's was a different creed, the creed of longing and of loss, which sought to spring from earth and to create its own heaven,—enterprise in which it is not easy to succeed."

Stopford Brooke remarks: "Wordsworth's 'Skylark' is true, perhaps to the everyday life of the bird and the poet remembers, because he loves his own home, that the

singer will return to its nest ; but Shelley sees and hears the bird who in its hour of inspired singing, will not recollect that it has home. Wordsworth humanizes the whole spirit of "the pilgrim of the sky" "true to the kindred points of heaven and home." Shelley never brings the bird into contact with us at all. It is left in the sky singing ; it will never leave the sky. It is the archetype of the lark we seem to listen to, and yet we cannot conceive it. We have no power—"What thou art we know not." "

Herford remarks : "It is neither, like Shelley's 'Skylark' a flight of lovely images of the Lark's song, nor, like Meredith's nightingale-poem, an elusively life-like imitation of the song in cunningly arranged vocables."

The Excursion

A portion of the first book was written as early as 1795-1797 ; Books I and II were mainly
Date of com- completed in 1801 and 1802 ; the remaining
position. seven books were written between 1809 and 1813, and the whole work was published in 1814. 'The Excursion' was planned as part of a larger
Part of a whole, to be entitled 'The Recluse,' a frag-
larger plan. ment of the first division of which was posthumously published under the latter title in 1888. 'The Prelude' was a preliminary study to this great projected work. In the Preface to 'The Excursion' the author tells us that "his minor pieces, which have been before the Public, when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connection with the main work as may give these claim to be likened to the little calls, oratories, and, sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices."

In the Preface to the edition of 1814 of 'The Excursion' Wordsworth tells us that he does not intend **Scope and purpose of the poem.** "to formally announce a system," but he intimates that a system is latent in the poem, and leaves the reader to construct it for himself.

Wordsworth then proceeds to give us a "kind of Prospectus of the design and scope of the whole Poem" in the form of a quotation from the conclusion of the first book of 'The Recluse.' He is 'to weigh the good and evil of our mortal state.' He is to sing "of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love and Hope ; and melancholy Fear subdued by Faith ; of blessed consolations in distress ; of moral strength, and intellectual Power ; of joy in widest commonalty spread ; of the individual Mind that keeps her own inviolate retirement, subject to conscience only and the law of God."

A little further on, he declares his moral purpose in writing it to be to

"Arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of death, and win the vacant and the Vain
To noble raptures"

and enlarges the scope of his work, for he continues :

"While my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external world
Is fitted :—and how exquisitely, too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind ;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended night
Accomplish :—this is our high argument."

The Poet then invokes the prophetic spirit to descend upon, and inspire, illumine, and guide him, so that his song

“ With star-like virtue in its place may shine,
Shedding benignant influence, and secure,
Itself, from all molevolent effect
Of those mutations that extend their sway
Throughout the nether sphere...”

The poem shows traces of local scenery and the effects of the poet's intimacy with Nature, of the natural beauty and grandeur of Racedown, Alfoxden, Grasmere and Allan Bank. Says Hazlitt : “ The poem of ‘ The Excursion ’ resembles that part of the country in which the scene is laid. It has the same vastness and magnificence, with the same nakedness and confusion. It has the same over-whelming, oppressive, power. It excites or recalls the same sensations which those who have traversed that wonderful scenery must have felt. We are surrounded with the constant sense and superstitious awe of the collective power of matter, of the gigantic and eternal forms of nature, on which, from the beginning of time, the hand of man has made no impression. Here are no dotted lines, no hedge-row beauties, no box-tree borders, no gravel walks, no square mechanic inclosures ; all is left loose and irregular in the rude chaos of aboriginal nature. The boundaries of hill and valley are the poet's only geography, where we wonder with him incessantly over deep beds of moss and waving fern, amidst the troops of red deer and wild animals. Such is the severe simplicity of Mr. Wordsworth's taste, that I doubt whether he would not reject ‘ a druidical temple,

Effect of the physical environment.

or time-hallowed ruin, as too modern and artificial for his purpose. He only familiarizes himself to his readers with a stone, covered with lichens, which has slept in the same spot of ground from the creation of the world, or with the rocky fissure between two mountains caused by thunder, or with a cavern scooped out by the sea. His mind is, as it were, coeval with the primary forms of things ; his imagination holds immediately from nature, and ' owes no allegiance ' but ' to the elements.' "

(*The English Poets*)

Wordsworth focuses his mind on the universal elements of human nature and not with its accidents, inequalities, individualities, and extremes.

Effect of social environment.

Myers points out that many characters may be recognized in the characters of 'The Excursion.' The Wanderer is a picture of Wordsworth himself—"an idea of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances." The solitary was suggested by a broken man who took refuge in Grasmere from the world in which he had found no peace ; and the characters described as lying in the churchyard among the mountains are almost all of them portraits. The clergyman and his family described in Book VII were among the poet's principal associates in the vale of Grasmere.

The first book is entitled "The Wanderer." The author, after a walk across a moorland on a glaringly hot summer morning, meets by appointment at a ruined cottage a middle-aged scottish pedlar (the Wanderer) with whom he plans a walking tour. The Wanderer's own history is set before us in a piece of

poetic autobiography which in its greater moments recalls or resumes 'Tintern Abbey' and the early books of 'The Prelude.'

In the *Wanderer*, too, Wordsworth distinguishes the epochs of growth. While still a child, the *Wanderer* was a visionary, endowed with the mystic's consciousness, perceiving 'the presence and the power of greatness,' and gathering those impressions which were to be the 'hiding place of the man's power.' He was fond of nature, and in later boyhood Nature appealed to him in such a way as not only to arouse the senses, but to awaken imagination. Even in the 'fixed and steady lineaments' of 'naked crags,' he 'traced an ebbing and a flowing mind.' His imagination fed on tales of the mountains, legends of the woods, stories of martyrs, of giants, and fiends. The emotion of fear was to him 'a cherished visitant.' Nature had not awakened in him the delight of love as yet.

The Youth experiences such hours of rapt communion with Nature as had been known to Wordsworth himself. The soul is submerged in the deeps of a trance-experience in which the intellectual limits of self practically vanish, and the feeling-self enters into a profound communion with the living God, rapt in an ecstasy of ineffable blessedness and love. And this mystical soul of the youth was intimately associated with Nature, in the presence of whose mighty forms

'Thought was not ; in enjoyment it expired.'

After he had reached later youth, he taught school for a maintenance, but, finding himself unfitted for the task, he became a pedlar. The pedlar's life also brought him in contact with Nature, and with rural folk whose manners,

enjoyments, pursuits, passions, feelings (chiefly those essential and eternal in the heart) he saw.

We are thus led to a picture of a man healthy, hopeful, undepressed by the world and its care, observant, studious, thoughtful and religious, kindhearted, considerate, intelligent.

Soon after their meeting, the Wanderer told the story of Margaret, or 'The Ruined Cottage'—one of the most pathetic of all the sorrowful tales Wordsworth ever wrote. Left by her weaver husband to support two children while he went to the Napoleonic wars, she had maintained a lonely existence for nine years, had apprenticed one child and lost the other, and had finally died of a chill, due to the ruinous state of her dwelling. Says Sneath : "Here is pathos, tenderness, and profound passion—a picture of silent, though desperate, sorrow on the part of a man, and of heart-wasting fidelity and love on the part of a woman ; and their only reward is death and the grave. One rises from reading this poem feeling that he has been listening to a careful and sympathetic student of the human heart, who is acquainted with its profounder moods and passions, who has looked long and steadily into its depths, who has noted the great undercurrents of its life, and can tell with delicacy and power what he has seen. There is no mawkish sentimentality, but a dignified, yet deeply passionate portrayal of the tragic experience of the soul."

Legouis remarks : "He was a great poet when, in 1797, he wrote 'The Ruined Cottage'—he never outdid that pastoral and, 'indeed, only once or twice again reached such perfection. Yet (if we set aside the words

of comfort and resignation wherein, years after, it was wrapt up), in itself, the tale is most distressing and desolate. Wordsworth's usual optimism is not to be found in it. It implies a protest against the iniquity of society and the harshness of fate. It is one of Wordsworth's masterpieces, but, in a moral sense, can scarcely be called Wordsworthian."

At the close of the Tale when the poet has turned away to hide his emotion, the old man gently checks him, recalling how he had himself overcome the first impulse of sympathetic grief :

"My friend, enough to sorrow you have given
The purposes of wisdom ask no more..."

When this Tale is over, the travellers go to a neighbouring village for the night. Next day, ascending to a secluded little valley high in the mountains, they visit the solitary, the subject of Book II. He is a scottish Presbyterian minister who had been chaplain of a Highland regiment, had resigned and married happily, but lost his wife and children, and, after some years of dull apathy, was stirred to life by the French Revolution. He became an ardent revolutionary and then a sceptic, renouncing his ministry ; but the transformation of the revolutionary spirit into the spirit of conquest disillusioned him. He is now living a secluded life in the cottage of a shepherd where he entertains the travellers with a luncheon of cheese, oat-cakes, and fruit, and as he shows them the vale recounts the death on the mountains of an old pensioner of the shepherd's family whose funeral the visitors had seen as they descended into the valley.

The scenes which prepare for the discussion—the classic description of the upland valley of Blea Tarn, the funeral procession, the first sight of the solitary himself, consoling the bereaved and weeping child with ‘red ripe currants,’ and the cordial meeting of the two old friends, have indeed genuine charm.

The solitary is partly Wordsworth himself. The Wordsworthian traits steal in, involuntarily, through the lure which ‘solitude’ in the heart of Nature exercised upon the poet’s imagination. The authentic Wordsworth speaks through him when he describes the glory and gloom of his mountain home, the

‘Two huge peaks

That from some other vale peer into his,—”
the lofty brethren who, when storm rides high, chiefly bear their part in the wild concert :

‘Then all the upper air they fill

With roaring sound, that ceases not to flow
Like smoke along the level of the blast,
In mighty current.’

The sceptic has even heard that more mysterious music which the mountains gave forth to Wordsworth’s ear :

“Nor have Nature’s laws

Left them ungifted with a power to yield
Music of finer tone ; a harmony
So do I call it, though it be the hand
Of silence, though there be no voice ; the clouds,
The mist, the shadows, light of golden suns,
Motions of moonlight, all come thither, touch
And have an answer.”

The solitary sketches his own life and despondency.

Book III. Says Sneath : " It seems as though Wordsworth introduced the solitary's gloomy philosophy here for very much the same reason as that which impelled him to introduce the philosophy of Godwin into 'The Borderers'—to present the saner views of human life and destiny which, by this time he had formed."

Here is presented the Wanderer's reply to the solitary

Book IV. —which is the chief purport of the poem. The Wanderer refuses to justify the solitary in despairing because the glowing visions of his youth had faded. He too had known those raptures, and had found for their loss abundant recompense. Youth and manhood change and pass, but the eternal things remain, and it is the loftiest part of us which aspires to them. Hope, though more rational than despondency, is difficult because "'tis a thing impossible to frame conceptions equal to the soul's desires."

Then he turns to the solitary's loss of faith in 'social man.' He says that Man can be redeemed only by the operation of his own virtue, by knowledge of facts and knowledge of himself. The enemy has triumphed justly by superior energy and firmer faith over opponents vacillating and inconsistent.

Then he calls in the Wordsworthian principle that childhood is the hiding place of man's power, and bids the solitary, revisit the scenes of his youth, and revive early memories, for 'strength attends us if but once we have been strong.' Even superstition is better than apathy. He seriously sends the solitary to school with the Greeks. Let him close his cynical Voltaire, and study how the

fancy of unenlightened Grecian shepherd or hunter fetched divine forms from sun and moon, nourishing thereby the Admiration, Hope and Love by which we live.

In short, the Wanderer's cure for pessimism, and the cynicism and misanthropy which it so often involves, is faith in God and his kind providence, faith in immortality, obedience to conscience, and love for, and communion with, Nature.

The argument culminates in the assertion by an image of extraordinary beauty, set forth with Miltonic amplitude of phrase and music, of the soul's power to transmute all the obstructive elements of its experience into new sources of strength :

“ Within the soul a faculty abides
 That with interpositions, that would hide
 And darken, so can deal that they become
 Contingencies of pomp ; and serve to exalt
 Her native brightness. As the ample moon
 In the deep stillness of a summer even
 Rising behind a thick and lofty grove
 Burns, like an unconsuming fire of light,
 In the given trees ; and, kindling on all sides
 Their leafy umbrage, turns the dusky veil
 Into a substance glorious as her own,
 Yea, with her own incorporated, by power
 Capacious and serene. Like power abides
 In man's celestial spirit ; virtue thus
 Sets forth and magnifies herself ; thus feeds
 A calm, a beautiful, and silent fire,
 From the borcum branches of mortal life,
 From error, disappointment—nay, from guilt ;

And sometimes, so relenting justice wills,
From palpable oppression of despair."

The 'correction' despondency is thus indeed effected by calling into play 'nothing more than what we are.' But 'what we are' is that which by our spiritual energies we have power to become. So he concludes :

"So, bulid we up the Being that we are,
Thus deeply drinking in the souls of things
We shall be wise perforce."

After spending the night in the cottage the travellers depart next morning, and accompanied by **Book V.** the solitary walk in the cool of the day to a wide valley with a copious stream, a crystal lake, scattered farms and homesteads, a grey old church, a churchyard, and a stately parsonage. With this changed setting the growing dominance of Anglican orthodoxy in Wordsworth's mind becomes unmistakable. The poet pauses to describe the monuments in the church walls, to defend the rite of baptism, to explain the authoritative status of the Priest among his flock, the feudal dignity of his mansion.

The baptismal font suggests to the solitary the great gulf between man's professions and performance, the weakness of human nature, and the consequent illusion of the lofty aspirations mentioned in the Wanderer's discourse.

As the solitary closes his mournful commentary on human character and life, the Pastor of the village church approaches the little group. He is called upon to solve the difficulty, and replies that though reason is powerless, an attitude of trust in God will lighten life's gloom and

ensure true happiness. He who lives in accord with the law of right reason, that is, who obeys the law of his moral being, will have the clearest apprehension of those things which lie beyond the unassisted powers of his rational nature. Says Sneath : " Wordsworth, in the Pastor's introductory words, is calling attention once more to the ethical momenta in human knowledge, and, in so doing, is undoubtedly on solid ground so far as epistemology is concerned, for the moral life is unquestionably a factor in cognition."

But, descending from these lofty heights to more common levels, the Pastor affirms that life is fair and tempting, grateful and refreshing, or forbidding and cheerless, according as we view or approach it. To this the Wanderer assents, and remarks once more on the limitation of human reason. Moral truth has certain fixedness or stability at the base, but on the surface admits of manifold applications and interpretations as circumstances vary.

At the request of the solitary the Parson gives some illustrations from the families of his own parish. The range of character-types which Wordsworth here handles with knowledge and power is remarkable. As Herford remarks : " Here at least he is not the poet of the peasant only ; and the benign touch which at some point in all these histories emerges, is singularly varied in kind. None of them has more natural charm than the opening story of the quarryman and his wife, not yet tenants of the graveyard there, but living in the rude hut visible high up on the mountain : a life of cheerful content with the hardships of their lot. The miner's story is more

chequered ; he had sought for precious ore with unconquerable tenacity, but in vain, for years ; then, at last discovering it, plunged into dissipation and vanished. But he is redeemed by his strength of purpose, and though he is lost, the track he daily traversed remains and is known as the Path of Perseverance."

In Book VI, the Parson tells of various persons buried in "The churchyard among the Mountains."

Books VI and VII. Among these are the disappointed lover who turns to books and science and whose 'fluttering nerves' are gradually composed and 'jarring thoughts' restored to harmony ; a clever and profligate actor, native to the country, who returned thither to die repentant ; a Jacobite and a Whig Squire, opposed in principles yet such close friends that they had a simple monument ; a wilful, jealous woman, subdued to charity and resignation in her last illness after offering prolonged resistance to the benign influences ; the 'amiable' Ellen, betrayed by her lover, who was forcibly separated from her child and went to nurse another infant and died of grief at the loss of her own baby, attributing this to her neglect ; a man, Wilfred Armathwaite, who died of remorse for his unfaithfulness to his wife ; a wife and mother who lived on in the strength and industry of her daughters ; a country clergyman and his family ; another clergyman renowned for piety ; a deaf and a blind man both of whom maintained cheerfulness in their affliction ; the infant granddaughter of an aged Dalesman ; a young volunteer for the Napoleonic wars cut off by premature death ; and a knight of Queen Elizabeth's time, who had settled in those solitudes. To vary the monotony of these obituary

notices, a lonely wood-cutter is introduced, a man of "cheerful yesterdays and confident tomorrows." On the whole the record is a credit to Man. It shows that life is in many respects a tragedy, and full of mystery. Suffering, however, plays its part in the human economy. It develops the virtues and builds up character—which virtues become in turn means of support. Furthermore, Nature and solitude minister to human need; and Man's extremity, in the presence of life's mystery, becomes Faith's opportunity to show her might, and to prove her excellence.

Sneath says : "Wordsworth's solution of the problem of life, in response to his own questioning as represented in the solitary's doubts concerning its worth, and the worth of Man, is essentially the solution furnished by Christian Theism. Life is worth living, and the "inner frame" of Man is good. But life must be grounded in faith in divine Providence, in immortality, and in those sublime virtues which alone confer value on the human soul." Sneath goes on to point out that the conceptions and beliefs of religious faith, and the poetic intuitions, in Wordsworth's poetry, are not mutually opposed. He says : 'In 'The Excursion' and in the later poetry of Wordsworth, the *content* of the Poet's faith is essentially the same as in his earlier poetry, but the *way of approach to it*, or the *mode of apprehending it*, is different. In Wordsworth's early poetry we have mystical vision and intuition—in the later we have rational and religious meditation and belief. In the former we have immediate apprehension of Reality; in the latter, mediate. The object of the former is the spirit of Nature; the object

of the latter is a personal God. Therefore, in a sense, God figures more conspicuously than Nature in "The Excursion" and "Ecclesiastical sonnets." '

In this book, on the way to the Parson's house the
Book VIII. company discuss the Industrial Revolution and the social and economic changes it has wrought in the north country—its promotion of foreign commerce and its degradation of the workingman by the factory system. Arrived at the pleasant vicarge the travellers are greeted by the Pastor's hospitable wife and daughter and enjoy a social meal, interrupted by the advent of his young son and a schoolboy friend from a fishing excursion.

This leads the Wanderer in the beginning of Book IX,
Book IX. to a discourse on the blessedness of childhood, its nearness to God, and the need of preserving this youthful confidence and faith up to old age. The old age affords

" Fresh power to commune with the invisible world,
 And hear the mighty stream of tendency
 Uttering, for elevation of our thought
 A clear sonorous voice "

which cannot be heard by those who are busy with the world. 'An active principle pervades the universe, its noblest seat being the human soul.' Man must not be a passive tool, but be free 'to obey the law of life, and hope, and action.' Hence his attack upon the factories, which not only break up the family life but enslave the worker, crushing the spirit out of very childhood. After describing the dull and deformed figures of the young hands as they creep out of the factory, he cries:

"Is this the form,
 Is that the countenance, and such the port
 Of no mean Being ? One who should be clothed
 With dignity befitting his proud hope ;
 Who in his very childhood should appear
 Sublime from present purity and joy !
 The limbs increase, but liberty of mind
 Is gone for ever."

Wordsworth was equally alive to the degradation of the country child who grew up, even in the heart of Nature, without gaining that fundamental liberty of mind :

"What kindly warmth from touch of fostering hand,
 What penetrating power of sun or breeze,
 Shall e'er dissolve the crust wherein his soul
 Sleeps, like a caterpillar sheathed in ice ?
 This torpor is no pitiable work
 Of modern ingenuity...This boy the fields produce.
 ...what liberty of *mind* is here ? "

Man needs to develop harmoniously all his powers, intellectual, emotional, and social. To this end an adequate scheme of universal education should be instituted by the state. In liberty of mind, thus founded upon discipline in virtue, England will become a nation truly free.

The whole party then goes out for an evening row on the lake, and supper is served beside a camp-fire on the shore of one of the islands. Afterwards they row to the mainland, climb a lofty hill, and enjoy a magnificent sunset during which time the Pastor offers up a prayer to the God, of whose glory the golden and crimson clouds are but a faint reflection. The poet and the Wanderer remain all night at the Parson's, but the solitary returns to this valley.

Wordsworth intimates at the close that in a subsequent work he hopes to tell of this unfortunate man's reclamation. The work, however, was never completed.

All through the poem we see both the landscape artist, and the poet of insight. It is full of delightful and superb pictures of the face of nature. It also reveals the mystical intuitionist. (Books I and IX).

The spirit of Nature ministers to human need. (Book IV).

Wordsworth's spiritual conception of Nature is rooted in his early mystical experience. The mental history of the Wanderer (Book I) proves this.

The poet protests against science, her 'brutish slavery' to the object, her subjection to sense, her contempt for imagination, her indifference to beauty, her arrogance and irreverence, her heartless methods, her blindness to the soul of things, her general materialism and lack of spiritual insight (Books IV and VI). Wordsworth, however, acknowledges her beneficent work in the practical application of her results.

It is men in their elemental passions and feelings that commend themselves to the poet for consideration. He takes as his subjects the dalesmen of Grasmere Vale. The narratives told by the Pastor are stories of simple village characters. In Books VII and IX he takes up the cause of the plain rural folk whose welfare is threatened by modern industrial life.

In regard to man's essential being Wordsworth represents him as endowed with a rational, moral and

religious nature—with capacities for self-determination and self-guidance in the light of lofty ideals.

Wordsworth's system implies neither unnatural repression nor unnatural excitation of our **Wordsworth's precepts.** faculties. While impressing on us conformity to nature as the rule of life, he suggests a test of such conformity which can be practically applied. 'The child is father of the man.' The instincts and pleasures of a healthy childhood sufficiently indicate the lines on which our maturer character should be formed. "The joy which began in the mere sense of existence should be maintained by hopeful faith; the simplicity which began in inexperience should be recovered by meditation; the love which originated in the family circle should expand itself over the race of men. And the calming and elevating influence of Nature—which to Wordsworth's memory seemed the inseparable concomitant of childish years—should be constantly invoked throughout life to keep the heart fresh and the eyes open to the **m**ysteries discernible through her radiant veil. In a word the family affections, if duly fostered, the influences of Nature, if duly sought, with some knowledge of the best books, are material enough to 'build up our moral being' and to outweigh the less deep-seated impulses which prompt to wrong-doing."

Wordsworth regarded the life of the mill-hand as an anomaly—a life not in the order of nature, and which required to be justified by manifest necessity and by continuous care. Wordsworth is neither a communist nor an aristocrat. "He holds to the distinction of classes, and thus admits a difference in the fullness and value of

human lots. But he will not consent to any social arrangement which implies a necessary *moral* inferiority in any section of the body politic ; and he esteems it the statesman's first duty to provide that all citizens shall be placed under conditions of life which, however humble, shall not be unfavourable to virtue."

Aubrey de Vere says that Wordsworth delivers two tidings for the behoof of his fellowmen. They are, first, that man's help does not come, as pride suggests, from himself :

" And if the Mind turn inward, 'tis perplexed,
Lost in a gloom of uninspired research ;
Meantime the Heart within the heart, the seal
Where Peace and happy consciousness should dwell
On its own axis restlessly revolves,
Yet nowhere finds the cheering light of Truth."

Secondly, his tidings are that man's help does not come, as sense suggests, chiefly from the world around us. The visible world is great because it tells us of things invisible—the things which belong to that universe which alone is true and eternal—the spiritual and Personal Universe of Deity.

'The Prelude' has a large measure of poetic unity, but 'The Excursion' has no unity at all.

Criticism. As Herbert Read says : " It is a collection of moral anecdotes strung together by a literary device of almost childish naivety. What dramatic structure there is in the poem is quite unconvincing. The author is supposed to encounter on various occasions, but always in the open, an old scotch Pedlar, and the rest of the poet's aim is embodied in a series of dialogues between the poet

and the Pedlar. But to achieve that purpose Wordsworth had to endow the Pedlar with impossible attributes." This poem is a variation on the lawless and discursive type of 'The Task.' The fact is that when Wordsworth turned to the task of composing a great philosophical poem like 'The Excursion,' his sensibility was blunted. As Herbert Read points out, he went on, trying to build up the structure of a philosophical poem with talent, with intelligence, with memory—with everything but feeling.

Elton points out that it is essentially a poem for extracts—"Its disorder and often ruthless tedium deprive it of unity." Such extracts are the passage in Book I describing the boy's rapture at sunrise; and the picture of a sunset at the close of the same book; opening of Book IV; the passage describing the wild joy of roaming through a mountain storm; stories of the countryside; picture of the Minstrel; Greek Divinities—where Wordsworth foreruns Keats in his delighted and noble appreciation of the old Greek religion; the sea-shell in Book IV; the metaphor in Book IV which compares the mind's power of transfiguring the obstacles which beset her, with the glory into which the moon incorporates the umbrage that would intercept her beams; the accounts of Langdale Pikes and of the Chaldean shepherds watching by night.

Herford remarks: "It is not a great poem; it falls not only in weight and unity of poetic substance, but in sustained power of poetic style and architecture. But it is a great and significant document of Wordsworth's mind in that transitional phase when, if already hardening towards the dogmatisms of his old age, it could still

interpose splendid bursts of imagination among reaches of dignified eloquence, light up bald argument with felicities of phrase, and expound a social philosophy not yet warped by political and theological prejudice."

Legouis remarks : "Argument is the process used at wearisome length in 'The Excursion.' This noble poem may be described as a long sermon against pessimism, scarcely disguised by a story. Though different speakers are introduced, their speeches are mere ventriloquism. Wordsworth, as the optimistic Pedlar, or Wanderer, assails Wordsworth as the solitary, or the late enthusiast of the French revolution, now dispirited. He raises all his eloquence to raise his other self to his own serene mood. 'The Excursion' too often reminds us of the debates between God and Satan at one time set forth in churches for the edification of the people, the rule being that Satan should have the worst of the controversy. It is the same with Wordsworth's solitary, who is presented to us in unfavourable colours ; his morals are not of the best. And, when he vents his misanthropy, he does not seem to be quite so fearless, cogent and impressive an exponent of his own views as he might have been."

'The Excursion' was nowhere received with enthusiasm.

**Criticism of
Wordsworth's
contemporaries.**

Crabb Robinson feared that the poem might possibly draw on Wordsworth 'the imputation of dullness.'

Keats wrote : "...for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain philosophy engendered in the whims of an egotist ? Every man has his speculations, but every man does not.

brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself.... We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us, and, if we do not agree, seems to put its hand into its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject."

Jeffrey's criticism was rather much too violently expressed. He wrote : "The volume before us, if we were to describe it very shortly, we should characterise as a tissue of moral and devotional ravings, in which innumerable changes are rung upon a few very simple and familiar ideas. But with such an accompaniment of long words, long sentences, and unwieldy phrases, and such a hubbub of strained raptures and fantastical subtilities, that it is often difficult for the most skilful and attentive student to obtain a glimpse of the author's meaning—and altogether impossible for an ordinary reader to conjecture what he is about. (Moral and religious enthusiasm, though undoubtedly poetical emotions, are at the same time but dangerous inspirers of poetry : nothing being so apt to run into interminable dullness of mellifluous extravagance without giving the unfortunate author the slightest intimation of his danger.) His laudable zeal for the efficacy of his preachments, he very naturally mistakes for the ardour of poetical inspiration—and, while dealing out the high words and glowing phrases which are so readily supplied by themes of this description, can scarcely avoid believing that he is eminently original and impressive—all sorts of commonplace notions and expressions are sanctified in his eyes, by the sublime ends for

which they are employed : and the mystical verbiage of the Methodist pulpit is repeated till the speaker entertains no doubt that he is the chosen organ of divine truth and persuasion."

Hazlitt wrote in 'The spirit of the Age,' in speaking of 'The Excursion': "Wordsworth's mind is obtuse, except as it is the organ and the receptacle of accumulated feelings : it is not analytic, but synthetic ; it is reflecting, rather than theoretical."

Coleridge whose judgment Wordsworth greatly valued openly confessed his disappointment. He confessed that "comparatively with the former poem" (*i.e.*, 'The Prelude') 'The Excursion' did not come up to his expectations. He had expected 'An Orphic song indeed !' but he found something very different—an inferiority which he conjectured "might have been occasioned by the influence of self-established convictions having given to certain thoughts and expressions a depth and force which they had not for readers in general."

Byron spoke of it as "a drowsy, frowsy poem."

Yet 'Excursion' did not go entirely without praise.

Charles Lamb said : "It is the noblest conversational poem I have ever read—a day in Heaven."

Hazlitt said : "In power of intellect, in lofty conception, in the depth of feeling at once simple and sublime, which pervades every part of it, and which gives to every object an almost preternatural and preterhuman interest, this work has seldom been surpassed."

Southey, after reading it, said : "It is by the side of Milton that Wordsworth will have his station awarded him by posterity."

CHAPTER VI

WORDSWORTH AS A SONNETEER

Wordsworth was extremely fond of the sonnet. It suited his genius. Wordsworth's chief aim in life was to compose a long poem, especially a philosophical poem, but he had not the capacity for that order of poetic architecture. His power is in bursts; his inspiration is short. He cannot move gradually through a train of thought or a consecutive narrative. He fixes his imagination and his life too entirely and intensely on single centres of influence. As R. H. Hutton says : " He kept to single influences : solitary contemplative communion with all forms of life which did not disturb the contemplative freedom of his spirit, was his strength. His genius was universal, but was not comprehensive ; it did not hold many things, but it held much." The sonnet suits his solitary and meditative temper. " That sequestered nook forced upon him the limits which his fecundity (if I may not say his garrulity) was never self-denying enough to impose on itself. Its narrow bounds, but fourteen paces from end to end, turn into a virtue his too common fault of giving undue prominence to every passing emotion. He excels in monologue, and the law of the sonnet tempers monologue with mercy." Wordsworth could effectively handle only one thought at a time and the sonnet was just suited to embody one thought. Elton

succinctly remarks : " The sonnet, with its freedom of choice in theme and emotion, united to its exacting discipline, and to its need of a clear intellectual basis, was a pre-destined form for Wordsworth."

Wordsworth re-installed the Italian sonnet in English poetry after a long period of disuse. Except in one case, all his sonnets are in the traditional Italian measures, or else in varieties of them of his own invention. In general, he feels free to extend the practice of Milton, which in one essential had departed from that of the Florentine masters. Milton, while keeping, in most cases, the orthodox rhyme-divisions, had often allowed the volta—the break in grammar and thought which forms the pivot of the poem—to fall beyond the close of the eighth line ; and Wordsworth suggests that " this is done not merely to gratify the ear by variety and freedom of sound, but also to aid in giving that pervading sense of intense unity in which the excellence of the sonnet has always seemed to me to consist." Wordsworth often varies the position of the break but in some of his best sonnets he keeps it strictly and attains harmonious balance as in the sonnet beginning "With Ships the sea was sprinkled far and nigh." The metrical analysts show that the volta is seldom obscured, by Wordsworth, though often displaced ; that in the octave, his favourite forms are the permitted ones, *abba abba* and *abab abab*, though in the later series the irregular form *abba acca*, and its variants, becomes very abundant ; that in the sestet the schemes, *cd cd cd*, *cde cde*, and *cde dce*, are well represented, but that many other varieties occur as well, including some inartistic ones ; and, lastly, that Wordsworth's skill in breaking up the

individual lines is great and studious. Often, in many of the greater achievements in this kind, the line is left unbroken, and is felt to be continuous and unitary. But at need there is a rapid, almost choppy, certainly agitated emotion, effected by shifting of pauses, as here :

“England hath need of thee : | she is a fen
Of stagnant waters : | altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, |”

or, as in the poem to his dead daughter Catherine, where there is a wonderful correspondency of the rhythm with the for once half-unnerved word, and where the normal partitions of the poem are shaken and shifted by the cross-currents of sharp feeling :

“ Surprised by joy | impatient as the Wind
I turned to share the transport | Oh ! with whom
But Thee, | deep buried in the silent tomb... ? ”

For his inspiration Wordsworth went back to Milton. Like Milton Wordsworth was drawn to the form by its capacities for prophetic, uplifted and indignant utterance. Like Milton too he avoided the love-sonnet, though he wrote one ‘Why art thou silent ?’ to prove that he could, if he thought fit, ‘write in a strain that poets have been fond of.’ But while for Milton the sonnet-form was too narrow for the spacious freedom of his poetic energy, to Wordsworth

“ ’Twas pastime to be bonnd

Within the sonnet’s scanty plot of ground.”

Wordsworth used it far more freely than Milton and for more varied purposes. He has left more than five hundred sonnets—ruminative, mystic, political, ecclesiastical, patriotic, descriptive, occasional, topical and miscellaneous.

Only in those sonnets which utter his magnanimous patriotism, his dauntless passion for English liberty, his burning sympathy with the oppressed, the 'holy glee' of his hatred of tyranny, is to be heard a distinct echo of the poet who first "gave the sonnet's notes to glory." The rest have Wordsworth's individual colour and hue, tune and tone. Says Bailey : "He is a greater master of the sonnet than Milton ; the greatest on the whole that England has known."

The first group of sonnets was composed in 1802. One afternoon his sister read to him some sonnets of Milton. Already acquainted with them as he was, he was then particularly struck by their "dignity, simplicity, and majestic harmony." He at once "took fire" and that same afternoon produced three sonnets—"the first I ever wrote except an irregular one at school." The sonnet on Napoleon is almost a literary exercise. But the Westminster Bridge sonnet is one of Wordsworth's most perfect things, written 'on the roof of a coach' as he and Dorothy drove over Westminster Bridge on the way to Dover. Seven sonnets were written during the stay at Calais. In "O Friend ! I know not which way I must look," the vanity and parade of his country is lamented, and a feeling expressed that the march of wealth is productive of mischief. The famous sonnet on Milton shows him in despair over the state of things at home. "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free" and 'On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic' are of the first order and without flaw.

The nine sonnets of 1803 are mostly dedicated to liberty. Most of them are born of his observations and

reflections concerning the movements of Napoleon. The sonnets "One might believe that natural miseries," "There is a bondage, far worse, to bear," "These times strike monied worldlings with dismay," "England! the time is come when thou shouldst wean" and "When looking on the present face of things" reveal his state of mind so far as events of the time are concerned. "To the Men of Kent," "In the Pass of killicranky," "Lines on the Expected Invasion" and "Anticipation" are poems written really in anticipation of a probable invasion of England by Napoleon.

The notes sounded in these sonnets are—shame for England's weaknesses and vices, love for her and pride in her past; oppressive fear of the menace of Napoleon, and heroic reaction from the fear; ardour for the freedom of other nations also, and passionate sympathy with the heroes who had died in vindicating it. Herford remarks: "Milton had given the initial stimulus, and Miltonic the sonnets never cease to be in their massive eloquence, their prophetic vehemence, their accesses of tenderness. But they are never derivative, and Wordsworth's mind was too original, and both the outward situation and his own inner development too unlike, to allow of more than proximate resemblance. Milton's nature was even firmer and harder than Wordsworth's, and more completely set; and if his sonnets often show, like that on his blindness, the turning back of a thought upon itself, which the sonnet-structure itself favours, we seek in vain in them the conflict of emotions which the real conflict of ideals in Wordsworth—the 'many movements in his mind'—sometimes involves in his."

A nother group, written before 1807, is unpolitical and miscellaneous but, as Elton remarks, it has yet a certain unity of fanciful and pensive mood, which in one instance, 'The world is too much with us,' rises and bursts into imaginative strength like a sudden flame on a mountain-top. The first of the four called 'Personal Talk' is Keatsian in temper, beauty of phrase, sensuousness and dreaminess.

In 1809-10 comes another double series, made in honour of liberty, and prompted by the struggles of the Tyrolese and the Spaniards against Napoleon—"noble in vigour and pure in finish."

In 1815-17 come other groups, in which the temper, is not less high, but the skill and inspiration are fading. After this begin the various premeditated series of sonnets—Duddon sonnets (34); Ecclesiastical sketches (132); sonnets upon the Punishment of Death (14). In the Duddon sonnets there is a welcome return of the old power and felicity. They purport to have been evoked as the poet followed the river's course from source to mouth, and the groundwork of each sonnet is always the local character of the scene which suggested it. In this series, says Saintsbury, Wordsworth has grappled, and more successfully than most of his followers except Dante Rossetti, with the great difficulty of a sonnet-sequence, in its parts retaining the individual charm of the form, while, as a whole, giving something like the effect of those long poems from which, except in narrative, modern taste has more and more turned away. In the "Ecclesiastical sonnets" which appeared in 1822, influenced by the conversations on church history which, while a guest at Coleorton, Wordsworth had with Beaumont, who was then

building a new church on his estate, and stimulated by the popular interest in the Catholic Relief Bill, Wordsworth undertakes to trace the history of the Church in England from the introduction of Christianity into Britain down to his own times. They are really 'ecclesiastical,' rather than religious or devotional. They anticipate at various points the ideas of the Oxford Movement of some years later, especially in the defence of land.

Says J. Dennis : " In his larger poems his language is sometimes slovenly, and occasionally, as Sir Walter Scott said, he chooses to crawl on all-fours ; but this is rarely the case in the sonnets—the language, like the thought is that of a great master."

Artistically and technically, Wordsworth's sonnets are imperfect. His sins against the sonnet decencies steep him to the lips. He was a wanton, defiant and perfunctory technician. Take, for instance, one of his sonnets, "Scorn not the sonnet ; critic, you have frowned," with a bastard Petrarchan octet (on three rhymes) ; without octet pause or sestet turn, and rhymed as to sestet on the Shakespearian scheme. In another sonnet, "A Poet I—He hath put his heart to school," the poet condemns formalism and says that it comes from its own divine vitality. The fact is that Wordsworth does not care for art. Even in his finest achievements the thing is done *currente calams*. Emotionally, however, Wordsworth lifted the sonnets to heights never before attained and sounded with it depths never before plumbed. A critic says : " He made it an affair of the intellect and the brooding spirit as well as of the fancy and the passions. In his hand the thing became an ecstasy as well as a trumpet,

a vision and a tenderness as well as an austerity. And as it is by these qualities of rapture, vision and tenderness that English poetry exceeds and outstrips and outsoars all other poetry, we may say that it was Wordsworth who gave to the modern English sonnet the special qualities that make it English."

Composed upon Westminster Bridge

Wordsworth himself says this sonnet was composed on Westminster Bridge (in London), on September 3, 1802, on his way to France; but one of his editors gives July 3 as the date of composition, from the fact that Wordsworth was at Calais in August. Wordsworth's memory in respect of dates is untrustworthy.

It is a description of London sleeping in the beauty of the morning. Compare the following entry in Dorothy's "Journal": "Left London between five and six o'clock of the morning outside the Dover coach. A beautiful morning. The city, St. Paul's, with the river—a multitude of little boats, made a beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge; the houses not overhung by their clouds of smoke, and were hung out endlessly; yet the sun shone so brightly, with such a pure light, that there was something like the purity of one of Nature's own grand spectacles."

Wordsworth looked on London with different eyes on his departure for France, and on his return. In this sonnet, nature has reasserted her dominion over the works of all the great city and the poet beholds it "not as full of noise and dust and confusion, but as something silent, grand and everlasting." He describes it as part of the country and invests it with a visionary glory like that of his own mountains in far-off Lakeland:

“Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour valley, rock or hill.”

Of the human London he thought only in its teeming
vitality, now lulled in sleep :

“And all that mighty heart is lying still.”

A critic remarks : ‘To any one who has even looked upon such a scene, this sonnet will bring it back with wonderful vividness steeped in a glow of sunshine, like a painting of Turner. Yet it is noteworthy how vague the details are as compared with those of a picture : the form and arrangement of the “ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples” are supplied by the reader’s memory or imagination and not indicated by the poet. The finest touch in the sonnet is that whereby the vast city is made “open unto the fields,” to the morning freshness and purity of the meadows that, at a distance surround it, the high lawns, that appear “under the opening eyelids of the morn.”’

This sonnet is verbally, almost perfect. The expression “A sight so touching in its majesty” is something that Wordsworth alone could have written. In “Dear God ! the very houses seem asleep,” speech fails and is at the point of dropping into silence. Says Bagehot : “Instances of barer style than this may easily be found, instances of colder style—few better instances of purer style. Not a single impression (the invocation in the concluding couplet perhaps excepted) can be spared, yet not a single expression rivets the attention...To Wordsworth has been vouchsafed the last grace of the self-denying artist; you think neither of him nor his style,

but you cannot help thinking of—you *must* recall—the exact phrase, the *very* sentiment he wished."

It is a beauteous evening calm and free

This was composed on the beach near Calais, in the autumn of 1802. Who is the "dear child" of the sonnet? Some critics had seen in her the beloved sister Dorothy. Herford justly calls it 'a strangely perverse criticism.' "To her it could never have been said 'If thou appear untouched by solemn thought, thy nature is not therefore less divine.' For Dorothy's emotional repose to the sublime goings-on of sea and sky and earth was even swifter than his own." The "dear child" seems to be his own daughter Caroline. It is mentioned in Dorothy's *Journal*: "We found out Annette and C-chez Madame Avril...We walked by the sea-shore almost every evening with Annette and Caroline, or William and I alone." Wordsworth found intimations of immortality in all children and the little French damsel of ten, too, with all her insouciance, bore within her the eternal presence of God.

Wordsworth's Nature-deities are not anthropomorphic. To him, the 'unknown modes of being' are more lovely as well as more awful than 'those of flesh and blood.' In this sonnet also, as Myers remarks, the sea is regarded with a sympathy which needs no help from an imaginary impersonation, but strikes back to a sense of kinship which seems antecedent to the origin of man.

Brennan says: "Like many of Wordsworth's finest poems this sonnet has its weaknesses—the flat first line, the fourth, the word 'everlastingly' in the eighth quite unnecessary after 'eternal' in the preceding line. The

sunset presents a thought already found in the 'Ode': only the mature man needs to be attentive to nature's hint of the divine, the child is everywhere accompanied by heaven."

On Milton

This sonnet was born of political interests. In "Scorn not the sonnet critic" Wordsworth calls on Milton as a great exemplar of sonnet-writing :

"When a damp

Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand

The thing became a trumpet ; whence he blew

Soul-animating strains—alas, too few ! "

Here he calls on Milton as a supreme helper in England's need :

" Oh ! raise us up, return to us again."

Wordsworth believes that 'by the soul only, the nations shall be great and free' and so we have here little enough of the national self-consciousness we now associate with patriotism. Wordsworth points his own generation to the life of Milton for a rich example of that unselfish devotion to all life's duties, high or low, combined with a life in the ideal which alone can give the inward happiness his countrymen have lost.

"Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart." Nevinson, in 'Essays of Freedom,' remarks : "The last thing with which one would compare a politician's soul is a star. The last thing one would say of a pamphleteer's soul is that it dwells apart. Soiled with the dust and sweat of controversy, distracted by passing interests, encompassed by crowding humanity, torn by the daily rage, occupied with tactics, maligned by evil tongues, clutching at com-

promises as triumphs, or engrossed in the infinitely little as practical concerns, how is a soul to be called a star ? How can it dwell apart ? It would seem as reasonable to call a scavenger the king of kings, and to say he dwelt in a stately pleasure-dome." The fact is that Milton was of the earth and yet not of the earth. In one sense purity and high idealism kept him apart from the men of his time, and yet he laid upon himself the humblest duties of life.

"Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea." This is a very apt simile. As Bailey says : "Milton's verses pass into each other as wave melts into wave on the sea-shore ; there is a constant breaking on the beach but which will break and which will glide imperceptibly into its successor we cannot guess ; the sameness of rise and fall, crash and silence, is unbroken, yet no wave is exactly like its predecessor, no two successive minutes give either eye or ear exactly the same experience."

The key-note of this sonnet is repeated in "There is a bondage worse, far worse to bear" and "These times strike monied worldlings with dismay."

On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic

It is a noble requiem on the fall of Venice which had enjoyed supremacy over all the richest countries of the Lower Empire and had powerfully resisted the encroachments of the Turks. Although Venice had long ago fallen from her lofty position, the poet does not see why he should not mourn for her now that the very shadow of her greatness is passing away :

"Men are we, and must grieve..."

Compare *Laodamia* :

"Tears to human suffering are due,
And mortal hopes defeated and overthrown
Are mourned by man."

London sonnet

Wordsworth himself tells us : " This was written immediately after my return from France to London, when I could not but be struck, as here described, with the variety and parade of our own country, especially in great towns and cities, as contrasted with the quiet, and I may say the desolation, that the revolution had produced in France. This must be borne in mind, or else the reader may think that in this and the succeeding sonnets I have exaggerated the mischief engendered and fostered among us by undistributed wealth."

Wordsworth deplotes the evils of his country and asserts the necessity of 'plain living and high thinking' for the greatness of a people. It is not riches, which are akin, "to fear, to change, to cowardice, and sloth," for do not ennobling thoughts depart when men change "swords for ledgers and the student's bower for gold?"—but patience, temperance, hope and fortitude that are the vital power in a people against oppression. Ruskin has justly said : "Wordsworth's distinctive work was a war with pomp and pretence, and a display of the majesty of simple feelings and humble hearts, together with high reflective truth in his analysis of courses of politics and ways of men."

It is not to be thought of that the Flood

This sonnet asserts the immovable faith with which true freedom is ever believed in by those to whom it has

come as an inheritance from a heroic past, and as the natural reward of Christian virtue, self-respect, and self-restraint. Wordsworth calls on his countrymen to remember the great men of the past who taught us how rightfully a nation shone in splendour to be worthy of speaking the tongue

“That Shakespeare spake, the faith and morals hold
Which Milton held.”

Toussaint Louverture

This noble and sublime utterance on the doom of the captured negro Chieftain has some lines in the greatest manner. Herford remarks :

“In the prophetic possession of the closing verses several distinct strains of Wordsworth’s poetic thinking are fused—the faith in Nature’s working with man, wedded to him in this God-like universe (‘there’s not a breathing of the common wind that will forget thee’), passion for liberty, and the reverential awe for ‘man’s unconquerable mind.’ And all the boy’s exultation in difficult and dangerous adventure, even the man’s real but reluctantly confessed joy in battle, springs into energetic and inspired assertion in the assurance : “Thy friends are exultations and agonies....” This sonnet, indeed, marks, more distinctly than any other, the point at which the emotional response to heroism, always ingrained and implicit in Wordsworth’s nature, first becomes articulate in his poetry.”

The world is too much with us

Wordsworth deploras the blindness and deafness of the average man to the glories of the world about him. Of all qualities which fit us to receive the training o

Nature the two most necessary are purity of heart and unworldliness of character, and in Wordsworth's thought they mingle into one. This sonnet enshrines this belief in a statement of its opposite. Compare his statement in a letter : " It is an awful truth, that there neither is, nor can be, any genuine enjoyment of poetry among nineteen out of twenty of those persons who live, or wish to live, in the broad light of the world—among those who either are, or are striving to make themselves, persons of consideration in society. This is a truth, and an awful one, because to be incapable of a feeling for poetry, in my sense of the word, is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God."

Rather than lose the power of appreciating Nature, the poet would willingly be transported back into pagan times, and live amongst the legends which peopled every grove and stream with divinities. Even a superstitious veneration of the forces of nature is better than apathy born of absorption in material things.

Afterthought

It is one of the greatest of Wordsworth's sonnets. For here geography and history, time and space, are transcended ; the river, which seems to flow out and lose itself in the sea, is in reality eternal, and a symbol of the eternity which man, born to vanish in the silent grave, may also win if the labour of his hands have served the future hour

"And if.....

Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower

We feel that we are greater than we know."

Here he looks back and looks forward in a strain, where clear knowledge of what Man is in himself alone, is mingled with quiet faith in what he is in God.

Mutability

Elton remarks: "A great metaphysical piece on that ancient Renaissance theme, the decay of outward form and beauty; a thought here applied to the corresponding decay of the outward forms of Truth and receiving once more the 'unimaginable touch' that the writer seemed to have lost."

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